Class 244.3 Book M366
General Theological Seminary Library
CHELSEA SQUARE, NEW YORK

IN MEMORIAM
DEAN MILO HUDSON GATES

"A great troop was moving . . . invisible as the wind, and yet white as the snow."

ST. CHRISTOPHER
BREAKER OF MEN
AND
OTHER STORIES

BY

REV. CYRIL MARTINDALE, S.J.

BENZIGER BROTHERS
PRINTERS TO THE HOLY APOSTOLIC SEE
NEW YORK, CINCINNATI, CHICAGO
1908

UNION THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
LIBRARY
NEW YORK

The St. Nicholas Series

EDITED BY THE REV. DOM BEDE CAMM, O.S.B.

ST. CHRISTOPHER

BREAKER OF MEN

AND

OTHER STORIES

107004
244.3
M366

Nihil Obstat.

D. BEDA CAMM

Censor Deputatus

Imprimatur:

✠ GULIELMUS *Episcopus Arindelensis*

Vicarius Generalis

WESTMONASTERII,

die 14 *Januarii*, 1908.

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

"A GREAT TROOP WAS MOVING . . . INVISIBLE AS THE WIND, AND YET WHITE AS THE SNOW" . . .	*Frontispiece*	
"RUN AWAY, DEAR, LIKE A GOOD BOY"	*face p.*	16
"THE KING SAT BENT COMPLETELY DOUBLE"	,,	32
CRATYLUS CROSSING THE FORD WITH THE CHILD JESUS . . .	,,	48
THE MARTYRDOM OF ST. WENCESLAS	,,	80
"STOP THE THIEF!"	,,	112

PREFACE

THE use we have made of historical data has, in this book, been determined by the exigencies of the story, and not *vice versa*. Thus, the *graffito* of the "Mock-Crucifix" exists, but was scratched on an inside wall, and perhaps a century before the date of our *Alexamenos*. The story is itself pure fiction, as that of *St. Christopher* is pure legend. *St. Wenceslas* keeps throughout close to history, which also supplied much of the materials for the story of *St. John Gualbert*. We trust, however, that the spirit of the stories is consistently "historical"; and that we have avoided the faults, while profiting by the privileges, of the hagiographer.

C. C. M.

May 1, 1908.

The St. Nicholas Series

EDITED BY THE REV. DOM BEDE CAMM, O.S.B.

LIST OF VOLUMES

BARNABY BRIGHT. By REV. DAVID BEARNE, S.J. (2 vols.)

THE STORY OF BLESSED THOMAS MORE. By A NUN OF TYBURN CONVENT.

FATHER MATHEW. By KATHARINE TYNAN.

JEANNE D'ARC: THE MAID OF FRANCE. By C. M. ANTONY.

ST. THOMAS OF CANTERBURY. By REV. ROBERT HUGH BENSON.

VITTORINO DA FELTRE: A PRINCE OF TEACHERS. By A SISTER OF NOTRE DAME.

THE LEGEND OF ST. CHRISTOPHER. By REV. CYRIL MARTINDALE, S.J.

GABRIEL GARCIA MORENO. By the HON. MRS. MAXWELL-SCOTT.

CARDINAL WILLIAM ALLEN. By REV. DOM BEDE CAMM, O.S.B.

BLESSED EDMUND CAMPION. By LOUISE IMOGEN GUINEY.

CARDINAL POLE. By J. M. STONE.

THE MAN'S HANDS. By REV. R. P. GARROLD, S.J.

THE STORY OF THE ENGLISH POPE. By F. M. STEELE.

A NEW STORY (Title not yet fixed). By M. E. FRANCIS.

Each Volume is in Foolscap 8vo, and has Six Illustrations reproduced by the three-colour process.
Price per volume,

CONTENTS

	PAGE
LEGEND OF ST. CHRISTOPHER	1
ST. WENCESLAS	45
ALEXAMENOS WORSHIPS GOD	89
ST. JOHN GUALBERT	127

THE
LEGEND OF ST. CHRISTOPHER

BREAKER OF MEN

Thou hast no power, nor may'st conceive of Mine;
But love I gave thee, with Myself to love,
And thou must love Me, who have died for thee.

BROWNING.

THE LEGEND OF ST. CHRISTOPHER

BREAKER OF MEN

I

Je suis à qui me mérite

THOUGH the great Emperor Septimius Severus was master of the Roman Empire, the little village of Zandruanda (perched like a white bird among the brown uplands of Armenia) was in a state of panic. For had not young Cratylus (aged eight), who lived there with his grandmother (aged eighty), enrolled a band of brigands and put himself at the head of it? Cratylus, at any rate, had decided that the village was terrorized, and what their chief asserted his men believed, seeing that his views every bit as much as his commands were law, though some of his subordinates were as much as ten years old.

Zandruanda was the native place of the

boy's old grandmother, and she had brought him there directly her son—his father—had fallen in battle, and his young mother had died of sorrow and loneliness while he was still a baby. But no die-away baby was *he*! a pink, noisy infant he came to Zandruanda; capable of quite suddenly making himself rigid in the arms of any one who was holding him, and of shooting out arms and legs so violently as to startle them, sometimes, into dropping him. Not that he minded *that*: he roared, no doubt; but they were tearless roars, and meant that he was indignant rather than hurt. "*He'd* be the one to get his way in the world," declared his old grandmother, after a few years' experience of what the neighbours rather oddly called "taking care of Cratylus."

And so, when half a dozen young ruffians of the village decided on enrolling themselves into that band of brigands, Cratylus quite naturally forced himself at its head. It was he who devised the head-quarters—a disused limekiln, curtained with honeysuckle and wild clematis, into which (quite unnecessarily, since there was a hole in

front) Cratylus burrowed a secret entrance from behind, through the nettles, and woe to any one who objected to being stung: it was he who dictated the day's programme; led the campaigns; recounted, at the evening rally, the day's results. And a formidable list they made—travellers held up; caravans rifled; fair ladies carried off. No wonder Zandruanda was panic-stricken.

To be quite frank, the villagers bore up rather bravely under their persecution. The country-labourers (merchant-princes in disguise) who imported wagon-loads of melons and gourds and mallows in the dewy morning, were not reduced, on sight of a small figure brandishing a stick in the face of their blinking but imperturbable bullocks, to that state of abject terror which seemed appropriate. Sometimes they actually tossed to their ferocious plunderer one of the little pink-fleshed, green-rinded melons, with a joke and a Good-day. This was not behaviour for a cringing suppliant! And it was exasperating when the old woman who sold quinces (a wicked old magician possessed of fabulous and enchanted hoards) positively

offered you a handful—of the over-ripe ones, no doubt—without even waiting to be attacked and have her throat cut; and then told you to "run away, dear, like a good boy, and play with your little friends."

Still, the time came when the band was generally recognized as a considerable nuisance. Old ladies objected strongly to sudden war whoops and brandished brooms, which startled them from their doze on the sunny side of the street; careful housewives were annoyed to find the cryptic symbols of the brigands charcoaled on their white-washed house fronts. Couples, a-stroll through the affectionate dusk, detested having little boys abruptly showing themselves from behind rocks and scrub-wood; and meaningful whistles or badly-imitated owl-hoots got on their nerves, and made twilight conversation difficult. It was intolerable that, just for a tap upon the shutter, the churn or the polishing should be deserted, and some small scoundrel who ought to have stayed at his work, should make off, on the first opportunity, to do whatever mischief young Cratylus might dictate. Fathers, and even

mothers, would get angry if this happened too often; awful cases of parental cruelty became known—boys were actually detained at home by force, though they assured their gaolers that should they disregard a second and a third tap at the shutter, nothing less than torture and execution would be their fate on the morrow.

All this came to an end in a rather unexpected way. To the exasperation of the whole village, a rival band had been set up by a youth named Philo; and though theoretically they existed only for the defeat and capture of the original brigands, they proved no less irritating to the community at large by their secret manœuvres and constant petty larcenies of food and stuffs for uniform or armour. Still, it was to them that Cratylus surrendered.

For one fine day a young lieutenant of his was put on trial for insubordination, he having preferred roasted chestnuts at home to a *rendezvous*, one rainy night, at the lime-kiln. Of course he was condemned; and smarting under the vigorous application of a nettle scourge, he traitorously approached

the rival captain and offered to lead him to the secret lair of Cratylus, where he might, during that tyrant's absence, possess himself at ease of rations and of arms. In silence did the high-souled Philo and his men follow that craven wretch to the kiln: but once there, they flung themselves upon him, bound him hand and foot in strips torn from his own shirt, and left him with this notice: "Philo disdains to owe victory to Traitors." By a supreme effort of self-control the band withdrew without commandeering a single eatable. Touched by this sublime conduct, and also, perhaps, because he was growing a little tired of a game which had lasted now for nearly a month, but most of all because of a secret suspicion that he could scarcely himself have exercised such self-repression, Cratylus issued a manifesto, wherein he declared that overcome by the generosity of his adversary, and finding that he had to deal with truly brave and fearless men, he would stay his hand, come to terms with authority (as represented by Philo), and relieve Zandruanda from its panic. "I bow," said he, "to the stronger man."

For all that, a year later, Cratylus was still king. And it was while he was at school that he got his nickname, Breaker of Men. This was not because he was a bully, or brutal, or hurt for the pleasure of hurting. No doubt he had his fights, a good many of them; and always conquered in the sense that he was never frightened however big his enemy might be, and never gave in simply because he was hard hit. (And to tell the truth it was not long before every one was quite content to do without fighting Cratylus.) But it was because the old schoolmaster had travelled a little, and was ready to teach Greek, even, to those whose parents would let them learn; and the Iliad so fascinated Cratylus that Homer became the fashion. How he adored Achilles! Achilles the man-breaker, the lion-souled! He could see him distinctly in imagination, upon the famous day when, raging at the death of Patroclus, the hero came out from his tent, armourless, just as he was, glorious like a sun. He could picture him standing there, settling himself legs well apart, back hollow, hand to mouth, and then *shouting*! . . . And, at that shout,

the despicable Trojans scuttling like so many wretched hares! He looked a young Achilles himself that day, though his hair was dark, not yellow, as he stood reading out the Homer; his boy's white cloak, wrapped over his shirt, could not hide how splendidly he was built, how easily and firm he stood: as he unrolled and rolled the papyrus, you could see the muscles running clearly up and down his arm. The class saw it, and kicked applause with their heels against the benches. "Rhexénor! Rhexénor!" they murmured; "Breaker of Men!"

The old schoolmaster sighed. He was a Christian; and so, in name at least, was Cratylus. But father and mother were dead; and grandmother and schoolmaster and ignorant parish priest had no slightest influence over him. No doubt he had heard of God and Christ and devil; but life was so full of splendid and vigorous things to do, of pleasant things to look and listen to, that he never troubled his head about what you could neither see nor hear. Not that he practised evil: sheer life and its opportunities of successful effort were quite enough for him.

People were inclined to wonder, at first, why Cratylus apprenticed himself to the larger of the two village smithies, instead of going soldiering at once, as he always said he meant to do. Possibly it was because he felt he was not wholly king here yet—in this little Armenian hamlet that must first be subdued before he went for larger fields. And certainly he succeeded: he became, as was inevitable, unlimitedly popular on account of his strength, his immense good humour, and his good looks. He succeeded, too, in another way. Not only in athletics and in the smithy, nothing could conquer him, but *people* too seemed to become useless when he was there; he could afford to neglect them; they could just pack up and go. Folks guessed this when the smaller smithy was closed. There was no call in the village for two smiths, when Cratylus worked for one of them. And the poor old craftsman, grown gray in Zandruanda, had, quite inevitably, to seek new trade elsewhere. Cratylus was sorry; but could he help it? Was he to work badly for a poorer workman's sake? Clearly not. The Breaker

of Men became truer to his name: he set definitely before himself these two principles —"I will only serve a master who is stronger than myself"; and, "I will serve no one whom I shall see afraid." Given this resolve, his days in Zandruanda were numbered: for as to strength, in the whole countryside none equalled him: as to fear, he saw, one day, his master panic-stricken.

It was when the great bull broke loose, and plunged bellowing down the narrow street, scattering the inhabitants like sheep. The smith, too, took to his heels; but Cratylus, as the bull thundered towards him, was aware only of a sudden sheet of flame, which seemed to flood his thighs and sides and neck, and of the uncontrollable impulse which flung him at the brute, and which drove his hands at its horns. He twisted its huge head suddenly down and sideways, forcing the beast's body of its own tremendous impetus to hurtle forward, snapping the spine. The bull died with a roar, and over it stood Cratylus, laughing. It was unbelievable; a feat of giants, of Titans! The story grew; details were added, or modified;

it became a myth. The bull, people told, had been colossal in size and weight; had snorted fire; had had hoofs of iron; Cratylus with one blow had felled him; or had swung him aloft like a puppy and dashed him to the ground. But to the hero of all this, one only fact stood out. The smith had fled: his master was a coward. "I have had enough of this," said Cratylus. "Next chance I get, I go."

That very evening the chance came.

A battalion of soldiers marched through the village, at their head a Roman centurion. For a helmet-buckle to be mended, they made for the forge; and there, framed in the doorway, limbs crimson in the firelight, stood Cratylus, swinging his great hammer. In the strong glow, the splendid muscles of chest and shoulders and rhythmically swinging arms and planted legs showed indomitable.

"Gods! what a man for the War-god!" shouted the centurion. "Will you come with us, lad? Will you join us?"

For answer Cratylus flung down his hammer.

"I've done with *that*!" said he.

And so that was the end of his boyhood and life at Zandruanda; for in spite of his old grandmother's prayers, he left next day with the centurion. "Stay with me, dear lad," the old woman had asked, "and take care of me. There are only a very few months left. Else I shall be all alone. I have no one at all but you."

"Cheer up, old mother," he had cried. "Abroad I shall get gold in quantities, and you shall have it, and instead of this hut you shall have a stone house, and live like a queen for the rest of your days. If I stay here what can I do for you?"

Suddenly the air of Zandruanda had seemed to have grown suffocating; village life was flat—meaningless—in fact, no life at all. How had he stood it for so long?

"I shall die in this dear home, my darling," said the old woman. "But go, if go you must; and Jesus be your strength."

With a laugh and a parting cheer Cratylus rode off, helmeted and sworded already; all Armenia, with its mountains, lay before him, and the mysterious East beyond; or

Thessaly, perhaps, where Achilles came from; and eternal Rome, even, where the Emperor lived!

He rode off; and it was incredible how few of the inhabitants, who all of them turned out to wave their hero a farewell, were really sorry that he went.

Only, in her poor plaster cabin, the old woman who loved him wept bitterly; and while she wept, and afterwards, prayed earnestly for Cratylus.

"Run away, dear, like a good boy."

II

And make me feel it was my sin,
As though no other sin there were,
That was to Him who bore the world
A load that He could scarcely bear.

FABER.

DURING the next few years Cratylus travelled far, seeing many lands, experiencing many masters, all of whom, one after the other, he proved weaker than himself, or in whom he detected fear. Then he would leave them, feeling himself humiliated by their mastery; and in this way very soon there was no country nor prince for whom he had not a certain contempt; love for his own home (if it had ever really existed) had died out, long ago, when with such fatal ease he had made himself its lord. He passed through that home, however, when he set out at last on his Eastward journey. Rome he had seen, and had scorned that degenerate Empire. Of what use to him were its high posts, which money

bought, and were mere soft sinecures for the idle noble who should win them? Thessaly, rich plain ringed with high mountains, had long ago forgotten Achilles, and even its famous breed of horses was effete. So he set his face towards the East: who knew what fate awaited him in Bactria, in Sogdiana, or India itself? And, as he crossed Armenia, he passed through Zandruanda. It was long before he even recognized its neighbourhood, so shrunken had it all become to his man's eyes; so decrepit, unpopulated, seemed the village. He was born there, a flatterer reminded him. Making an effort, he recalled those old boyhood days. How had he existed, he asked himself, in that cramped life? Wondering thus, he forgot to look for the forge; and he could not identify the cottage where his old grandmother had lived three lonely months, upon the neighbours' alms, after his departure. Indeed, he wholly forgot her too, and forgot to ask to see her grave. Nor, indeed, could he have seen it (had he found a guide who could remember where it was), so overgrown was it with nettles.

During these twenty years his strength had increased, at first, and had then grown set; his body had become hard and rugged, and its beauty diminished. The expression of his face changed only towards anger or contempt, sometimes to disgust, when the stale days of reaction after some marked triumph had to be lived through. He had had enough triumphs now to find the sweetness gone even from them; but tasteless indeed were the hours when no effort was being made, no hard enterprise pursued. The old popularity was long ago departed. He loved no one, and was hated by many, whom, in his serenely unconscious power, he had trampled out of existence. His life had been more than once attempted, but then he had always broken his man.

At last, on the furthest limit of the mysterious East, he thought he had found his heart's desire. The King there lived in a high fortress, all of a piece, it seemed, with the naked jumble of iron-coloured crags on which it stood, so sheer did the precipice sweep upward into walls, so tiny the windows which pierced square-topped towers

rising abruptly like the broken peaks of that high mountain. Only from the north could the fortress be approached; and the winding causeway was throughout commanded by smooth black bastions and guarded battlements. On east and south and west, an immense view stretched, range upon range of mountains, jagged like teeth of saws, fainter and fainter, one behind the other, down to the horizon.

Cratylus became the King's right-hand man; winning all but the supreme power, which was vigorously guarded by the tyrant. In his square, stone room (at the top of a corner tower, and absolutely bare save for a pile of fleeces for bed, a large stone pitcher of water, and racks for armour) Cratylus thought out the plans which should reduce into an even more absolute obedience the vast kingdom; and wholly without ruth or pity did the King have them carried out. On embassies, Cratylus could cow the haughtiest of foreign princes into submission. His rule seemed, like the very mountains, of iron and stone.

And yet this, too, had its finishing.

With an almost unreasoning severity, as it seemed, the King waged war against the complicated witchcrafts and magic rites which he knew existed among his people. Even to that far country Christianity had, in perverted forms, penetrated; and Devil-worship and hideous travesties of the sacrament were mingled with the abominable practices of pagan superstitions. One evening the King and Cratylus and some half-dozen men-at-arms were at supper in the great hall. Through the high row of westward windows the setting sun flamed in, making great red-hot squares of light on the wall opposite and leaving the high vault dark. Only over the King an oil lamp spluttered, and in the middle of the hall stood a high brazier. Suddenly the door crashed open. A body of soldiers, evidently guarding a prisoner in their midst, burst in; they rushed up to the dais, dragging the wretched creature with them, and a storm of execration arose. At last it could be seen that they held in their grasp a very old woman. She was a magician, they cried; a Vampire! She sucked children's blood; she

lived on dead bodies, raising them up from their fresh graves, or stealing in the likeness of mouse or bird into death-chambers and nibbling vilely round the cold ears and lips and nose of unwatched corpses. And only yesterday, on being refused alms by a poor woman with a baby at her breast, she had taken the child in her arms and dandled it, and kissed it, and that very night it had fallen into convulsions, and to-day it was dead. They had brought her to the King: let him punish her—make an example of her!

Furious at being defied by an old woman, the King demanded nothing more. The old crone remained silent, but he would ask no question, seek no defence.

"To the brazier with her!" he shouted. "Let us see whether she will like the kiss of coal! Let us see whether she, too, has blood that fire can drink!"

Silence for a moment, and then the sudden crackle of burning flesh, as a red coal, held in tongs, was pressed upon the old woman's lips. And then a shriek; and then, from that flayed mouth, a stream of blasphemy.

"Curse you," she screamed; "the devil curse you—may the devil curse you! He that has made of the world a pestilence, curse you body and soul, flesh and brain and soul for the hurt you are doing me." . . .

And as she shrieked on the devil she shrivelled suddenly and fell. The frame of the very old cannot resist much agony; and as the soldiers, with iron pincers, put coal after coal to her, she suddenly died.

They carried her away, and there was silence again.

The King sat, bent completely double, his face on his knees, his hands clasping his head. But his fingers, Cratylus saw, glistened with sweat, and his hair was matted.

Cratylus leaned over him.

"Gods!" he cried. "Has she bewitched you too? Are you dying? Lift your face."

He lifted a face pale and full of shadows. His eyes moved restlessly with a hunted look, and his lips could not stay still.

Cratylus knew that look. It was terror.

"Are you afraid?" he asked, incredulous.

"Of the devil!" said the King. "She cursed me by the devil! It has been the terror of my life. O, have mercy upon me! The whole world is his, and she his favourite. . . . What will the devil do to me?"

Without a word Cratylus left the hall, and the King sank completely to the floor, where he lay shuddering violently and sobbing.

Alone in his tower-chamber, Cratylus cursed his fate. Another failure, or futile triumph, as you pleased! Another coward! another of these mighty potentates trembling and aghast when *he* stayed wholly fearless. How he despised them all, these high monarchs of the earth, of whom he had just seen the highest fall to tears and sweat at the curse of an old woman! He looked out over the sea of tumbled mountains and valleys, all gloom and glow alternately beneath a sky still red-hot, for awhile, with sunset, but darkening rapidly. The immense outlook lashed his despondency. Oh to meet the One who could really rule all that! Who should fear nothing in it—know no law but his own sovereign will! how he would fall down and

adore him! And the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them rolled out into a great vision before him, there in the conflagration of the sunset so soon to sink to ashes. To meet with their real master! to serve him, whomsoever he might be, even were he that devil at whose thought the King had trembled.

The sun dipped, and the last mountain blackened. An extraordinary silence grew rapidly, and suddenly Cratylus was aware of the silence. Not a sound within the castle, or in its courts; not a noise of dog that barked, nor even the whirr of beetle's wing or bat's; nor even the sigh of the wind. He sat there numbed, and the silence grew in the darkness, all round him, and within him.

Then, in the black and horrible stillness, he knew distinctly that he was not alone. There was a presence in the room, close to him. Though it had now grown absolutely dark, surer was he than if his eyes had seen it, that a dreadful thing was there; a *person*, some one who was as vividly aware of him as he was of his awful visitor, whose will

was compelling his own, and forcing him to submission. It made him fall on his knees; it made him listen as if for words, and be ready for an extraordinary conversation. But a bewilderingly contradictory impression mingled with all this: he felt that this appalling Force would prove to be—could he really grasp it, get at its essence—something weak. And for a moment he actually saw, in the dense gloom, a white and sickly face, smiling with foolish lips into his eyes. An impression of utter corruption came upon him; the extreme of loathsomeness, a very filth of rottenness, was here: and yet it had its fascination; it commanded him; he felt, as he crouched, face on the stones, as if his whole self was streaming out of his keeping into it; and, as he gave himself, through and through, over and over, into its power, he knew for certain *that this was the devil, the Prince of Evil whom he had accepted for his master;* and he felt on his cheek as it were a sickening kiss, and in the very roots of his heart a chain that bound him, for all time, to sin. He consented.

The next few years in the life of Cratylus

were too horrible for us to speak much of. He did not leave the King, as of course he had resolved on doing; yet it was not as the King's servant that he remained. For the supreme authority which, in the old days, had remained in the monarch's hands, now passed over, in all but the barest theory, to Cratylus. For never before had strength, both physical and of will-power, seemed so extraordinary in the Armenian; though this was not really wonderful, since so tightly was he bound to his new Master that all that Master's power and will seemed to have passed into him, and what the devil willed, Cratylus could do, nay, *must* do. And the panic which the King had always felt for the Evil one, he now felt in regard to Cratylus, so completely did he identify (and rightly) master and man.

And so for hideous sin and crime there never had been such a time as that. Never so many unjust wars that drenched the country in the blood of the fallen and the tears of the survivors. Never such oppression of the poor, bringing sweat and sickness and starvation to the people, and sleep-

less nights to the rich who lived in agonies of fear concerning the gold they had got, and agonies of greed for gains still to be extorted. Never such false judgements in the courts, widow and orphan perishing before unjust judges. Never such mad and brutal pleasures, drunkenness and sin rotting men's brains and limbs after they had drugged the soul to death. And in this matter of souls was it that Cratylus seemed another man, and did truly devil's work. Hitherto he had been content to quell men's bodies; to break into an external obedience the men and women who resisted him. Of interior submission he had recked not at all. Now it was the whole man, body and soul, that he longed to smash; soul, though, above all, since it was there that Christian faith, especially, established citadels which his terrorizing had failed to carry. Grind men's bodies as he would to powder, there had been impregnable fortresses of patience, and forgiveness, and purity left intact. Now by most loathsome trickeries and cajolings (since he made use of arts to which he never, before, would have stooped) no less than by sheer cruelties

he sought his ends, and never rested till everywhere he had lit the fires of fury and vengeance in the hearts of young men; crushed maidens under shame more dreadful than any death; driven the aged to despair. Hell's kingdom filled fast.

And all this while there kept growing within him a double mood. He hated more and more the abominable Master whom he served, and whom he felt always at his side, prompting, suggesting, congratulating. He loathed that master, and he loathed himself, feeling himself the slave, not merely the servant, of that tyrant-force.

And yet that it was master, and himself a slave, he never doubted for a moment. In fact he saw, with horror, that in no way could he ever break, even should he wish it, from that slavery. But to wish to break away was just what he could not do: "He is too strong for me," he said in despair. "The Devil is my master for always; I shall go on doing his work for always. *It is too strong for me: I cannot help myself.*"

And so at the time of his greatest seeming strength, he felt himself most weak; when

most powerful for evil, he was most a slave; everywhere he did devil's work; everywhere *it was too strong for him.*

And yet the devil was not strongest of all.

* * * *

There was a hermit who lived some leagues away beside a river, and, by holding up his lantern at night, showed the ford to travellers. Cratylus would make an end of that; nothing of good was too trivial for him to prevent; nothing too high for him to fear. So that lantern, he determined, should be extinguished; that little act of charity suppressed. And as for the old saint himself, might not he too be conquered, his high virtue spoiled?

He set out for the river, which he could see winding in the valley, suddenly broad after spouting from the mountains through a chasm barely a few feet wide. He mused on how he should approach the hermit, and as he mused, a shrinking made itself felt within him, a reluctance to go at all. He wrestled against it, and dragged his feet along the path, exhausted more and more

every moment, struggling as in a nightmare.

Suddenly he realized that it was the masterful presence that was near him; that was tugging at him to come back . . . must he not obey? And then once more he was conscious, not only of its power but of that bewildering *weakness* he had guessed at before. And now—could it be?—it was cowering, shuddering backwards because of *fear*! Cratylus set his teeth. He would go forward. He planted his feet and bowed his body towards the hermit's hut, only a yard or two away, now. The huge power, like great arms about his waist, strained at him, tearing him backwards. Never had he experienced so vigorous a wrestle. Whence came his power to resist?

Suddenly the hermit appeared at the door, holding up a large wooden Cross.

He advanced a step.

"Back, Satan!" he said. "In this sign I conquer."

Abruptly, as though a chain had snapped, Cratylus was loosed. He fell violently forward at the foot of the Cross, his head

striking a stone. He remained for a space unconscious.

When he revived he was lying on a pile of ferns, and the hermit was bathing his forehead.

Thoroughly ashamed of this position, he sat up, but fell back dizzy.

"What has happened?" said he.

"You are a free man," answered the hermit. "Your master left you."

Cratylus began to remember.

"He was afraid of the Cross," went on the other. "He was not so strong as the Cross."

Cratylus recalled everything—the years of slavery, the sudden snapping of the chain, the Cross high over him as he fell.

"Henceforward," said he in a strong voice, "I will be the servant of the Cross."

Later, as his dazedness passed away, he began to make his plans.

"I will fight, father," he began. "I am strong. I will fight the King, and upset his wicked judges, and break the prisons, and rebuild all I have destroyed."

The hermit laughed quietly.

"The king sat bent completely double."

"All that may come," said he. "You have other work to do first."

Cratylus had a troubled recollection that pious Christians prayed and fasted and scourged themselves even. . . .

"Must I pray, father?" he asked.

"You shall pray in good time," said the old man, still smiling. "For the present, work; and I will pray."

"Tell me what to do, father," said the Breaker of Men, submissively, "and I will do it."

"It is not hard," said the other. "You will live with me, and you shall carry on your shoulders all travellers who wish to cross the ford. That shall be your work."

And Cratylus laboured long at this simple task, making himself servant of the wayfarers who came to the river. It was a strange career, full of humiliations wholly unexpected—as when those whom of old he had commanded, or evicted from their homes, or in any way oppressed, now came to speak insolently to him, and jeer at him, or kick him as he carried them. For the rumour had spread that Cratylus had gone crazed;

that the blow on his head had made a fool of him; and in proportion as he had been hated, so was he now contemned. Even this was not so painful to him as the terror shown by many—women especially and children—who did not understand the change. They could realize nothing but that here was their persecutor of yore—what cruelty, subtle and refined, was he not planning that he was fain to carry them over rivers? What diabolical craft was this? And they fled from him.

Cratylus in time ceased to wax furious at the insults, though never to suffer at the fear of himself he met with. Only in both cases he repeated to himself, "For Thee, Crucified," and went on with the labour. That was his only prayer. He still felt bewildered, not least by the strangeness of his appointed task. He knew nothing of Christ, but did what he was told was His work, and gradually his heart was changed.

In the idle spaces when no travellers passed, he would watch the hermit praying, and thus became familiar with long passages of the psalms and of the Church's liturgy;

at other times he explored the mountains, which fell, just there, in an immense black precipice, sheer to the plain where the river flowed. The water itself he tracked, once, into its ravine. This chasm was thought to be a gate to hell, and the country folk never dared to approach it. Cratylus, who was determined now to fear not even the devil, waded against the mighty current into the very heart of the mountain, and there, clambering over boulders, he could see in the dim light which filtered from the tiny strip of sky, far above, that the water gushed out, in tremendous force, from beneath the base of a kind of rock funnel in which the fissure terminated. This huge volume of water, forced upwards, it was clear, by some subterranean stream, welled up at first silent and black like sliding ebony; then, flinging itself against the narrow walls of the chasm, it foamed, booming through the echoing rocks, until it suddenly spread itself out over the pebbly ford.

In the spring the work was made indefinitely harder by the melting snows and sudden storms, which sent the river up in

great floods. One night Cratylus, having laboured all day against the swollen current, was heavily asleep in the hut when he felt himself shaken briskly by the shoulder. He looked up and saw at his side the hermit, with a strangely glad look upon his face.

"Up," said the hermit, "you are being called."

Cratylus could not believe it. An appalling storm was raging, with thunder and wind and torrential rain. The ford would be impassable, and who could be abroad on such a night?

"Up," repeated the old man, a little sternly, "to the work!"

Cratylus rose and quitted the house. The wind tore the door from his hand and crashed it shut behind him. The very footpath leading down to the river had become a rivulet of rain. Over the shingly ford the river escaped, hissing and rushing with a curiously shrill sound; but in the chasm, as it flung itself violently from side to side in the blackness, it sent up the most terrible bellowing, heard even above the thunder.

In spite of thunder, though, and stream,

Cratylus heard a wailing voice, inexpressibly sad and fearful, calling for help.

"Carry me across!" it cried. "Help me! fetch me across."

There was a sudden sheet of dazzling lightning in which every detail of the further bank showed clear in black and white. And on it stood a little boy, very thin and weak looking; he was dressed only in a shirt, and his hair and the linen were streaming with the rain. And his hands were clasped tight to his breast as he stooped a little and cried to be fetched across.

Cratylus, without waiting to wonder at this extraordinary spectacle, plunged into the river and was soon at the other side.

"Right!" shouted Cratylus. "Where are you?"

In the next flash he saw the little boy. He was still standing by the brink of the water, soaked and shivering, but silent now.

"Right!" cried Cratylus again, shocked at the boy's thinness. "We shall be across in no time, and there 's a fire waiting for you. Up with you! Arms round my neck tight; don't be afraid of hurting me. Good."

The boy, with astonishing agility, climbed on to the strong man's shoulder and sat there with one hand round his neck. He was so light that Cratylus scarcely knew when he was up.

"Now for it," he said. "Sit tight."

And he turned and went down into the stream.

The storm had not ceased, and the flood, flung violently forward from the bellowing chasm, swept even higher than before about his knees; the cold of the rain, after the warm hut, seemed to freeze his blood. Almost at once he stumbled, and only saved himself from slipping back by bending double over his huge staff. To raise himself required effort; his knees grew weak, and his shoulders bowed beneath the impact of the wind, of the weight of which he had now grown all too sensible. For as he drew himself once more upright he seemed crushed; a tremendous strain made itself felt all through him as he went forward, step by painful step. And though the storm howled in the ravine, and the waters roared and hissed loud as ever, all that suddenly seemed

to be happening at an immense distance; within himself he was immediately conscious only of grinding exhaustion and intolerable fatigue. Then, in that silence of his soul, he seemed to be aware of all the whole world. The storm and river and ravine had grown so unimportant, because he seemed to feel, at one and the same time, all the masses of all the mountains of that land, ponderous piles of rock, titanic boulders beating against the sky—all the huge oceans that swung terrifically against its coasts, and against the coasts of all the lands he had ever travelled through—and in a moment he had, as it were, a vision of the whole gigantic Earth, the overwhelming globe of seas and islands and continents, and all looming down on him, all poised upon his shoulders. And more than that: infinite tracts of clouds swathed that hugeness; and through these clouds other huge worlds swung round or hung, infinitely vast, and all to be held by him. For, unless he supported it, what should prevent its ruin? On whom else did it depend, all that universe of matter and of motion? Not on that

Enemy whom he had served! He was the destroyer, the universal antagonist! Not on the paltry race of humans, so pitiably weak, whom he himself had crushed and broken like gnats! Satan hated that universe; men were mere phantoms in it. It rested on *his* shoulders; could *he* uphold it? And he saw himself, stronger than his fellow men, no doubt; yet, compared to that sum of all things now massed upon him, he too was weak like a ghost or dream. What was the world to do? What could *he* do? "O God Almighty," he panted, "have mercy on me."

He moved a few steps easily. Then a second time the terrific weight pressed down on his shoulders, and he moved through the water, crouching almost double. And this time an added horror broke him. For in the vast globe of all the universe he saw that there was *sin*. The pitiable race of human people, of which he was one—(he saw that, now; he was just one of many, equally responsible, unprivileged—nay, more responsible in that he was stronger than his fellows, though certainly not greater just

because of that)—this weak race rose up, and in the face of the Power which kept them and their whole world in being, declared for their own will and supremacy. Cratylus stood in a sudden panic. Surely the Power, in scorn of all that insolence, would let go of the world; would simply let the universe, with the miserable revolutionaries in it, roll back into the nothingness whence it originally had come? And he seemed to feel the world left more and more to himself to bear; felt, too, more and more his own incredible dependence on that great Power; realized what had been *his* share in that appalling arrogance and revolt. "O God, most Merciful," he gasped, "be merciful to me, a sinner."

The bank was in sight already, but even as he pressed forward to cross the remaining water, there came down upon his bowed shoulders a new and wholly unconquerable load. Raised upon that sinful world, which he was struggling to carry, was a Cross, and on the Cross was lifted all the sin and all the sorrow of that world from its beginning to its distant end. It was all summed

up in that hanging figure, and Cratylus felt it. And with it the pressure of the infinite Love which had brought the Son of God so to take upon Himself that sin, and by that sorrow to atone for it. And beneath the triple burden of his new humility and repentance and love, Cratylus at last fell forward, crying as he fell, "I cannot bear it; Jesus, Thou knowest that I love Thee; save me, or I perish."

Cratylus fell, but found that his hands struck the further bank, and he was safe. The little boy slipped from his shoulder, and held out his hand. Cratylus took it, stepped on to dry land, and looked into the child's eyes. He knelt down, still looking, and then bowed till his face touched the ground. He had watched the wonderful change come over the Child's form and features, and, though he had never seen Him before, knew Him.

"I am Jesus," said the Child. "I am He through whom all the world was made and is preserved. In carrying Me, you carried the whole world. And I am He who, in My own body, carried your sins and all the

sins of the world; and of their weight I suffered you to feel as it were the shadow. And now you know that it is I who carry you, and ever have carried, and ever shall."

"Lord," said Cratylus, speaking like a little child, "how was it, long ago, that I did not perish; that you did not, for my service of Satan and my oppression of your elect, long ago condemn me?"

"Because," answered the Child, "there never has been the time when you were not being rescued by the prayers of those whom you persecuted; of the very weak, like your old grandmother in the village; of your old schoolmaster; of all whom you strove to break; they were too strong for you; and in the end My heart obeyed them, and I have saved you."

"Lord," said the Breaker of Men, "may I be your servant?"

"You shall be my friend," answered Jesus; "and your new name shall be Christopher; for you have carried Christ on your shoulder, and henceforward you shall always carry Him in your heart."

When the hermit came down to the river at sunrise, he found Christopher still kneeling, and the glorious light, now that the storm was over, made a halo all about him.

ST. WENCESLAS

I

Good King Wenceslas looked out
  On the Feast of Stephen;
When the snow lay round about,
  Deep and crisp and even.
Brightly shone the moon that night,
  Though the frost was cruel,
When a poor man came in sight,
  Gathering winter fuel.

II

"Hither, page, and stand by me,
  If thou know'st it, telling,
Yonder peasant who is he?
  Where and what his dwelling?"
"Sire, he lives a good league hence,
  Underneath the mountain:
Right against the forest fence,
  By St. Agnes' fountain."

III

"Bring me flesh and bring me wine,
  Bring me pine-logs hither:
Thou and I will see him dine,
  When we bear them thither."
Page and monarch forth they went,
  Forth they went together,
Through the rude wind's wild lament
  And the bitter weather.

IV

"Sire, the night is darker now,
And the wind blows stronger:
Fails my heart I know not how;
I can go no longer."
"Mark my footsteps, good my page,
Tread thou in them boldly;
Thou shalt find the winter's rage
Freeze thy blood less coldly."

V

In his master's steps he trod,
Where the snow lay dinted;
Heat was in the very sod
Which the Saint had printed.
Therefore, Christian men, be sure,
Wealth or rank possessing,
Ye who now will bless the poor,
Shall yourselves find blessing.

Cratylus crossing the ford with the Child Jesus.

ST. WENCESLAS

THE winter of the year nine hundred and thirty-five was extraordinarily cold. The whole width of the Moldau was one floor of ice, looking like black marble where the snow was cleared. The edge of hills and distant mountains was white and definite against the slate-coloured sky; and the town of Prague, with its huddled houses and steep roofs and twisted spires and the huge masses of the Ducal palace, made the most curious picture in black and white.

Across the great lozenge-shaped level of Bohemia winds tore violently from chasms in the sheer mountain walls to north and east; and even when they were southerly, they had raced madly along the Danube valley till, through the split Alps, they howled into Bohemia cold as ice. In the whole scene, the shrieking of these winds was the only sound: when they fell, all life seemed locked by the appalling frost; the

ear heard nothing; the eye saw nothing more.

But had you left the wharfs, and entered the little streets of Prague, where the stooping upper storeys seemed ready to knock together over your head, you would have reached the Palace; and there most certainly you would have found noise and life enough, especially if ever the doors swung open, letting out a crimson column of firelight and a shout of song.

For it was Christmas night, and in the great Hall the Duke was feasting his men and a mighty company of nobles.

The sounds of singing and laughing that you would have heard would come, however, from the barracks and outlying buildings rather than from the ducal banquet-hall, which lay in the very centre of the castle; and in no case could you easily have penetrated further than the Gate-house, where the small Podevin Witichind was getting supper ready for the porter.

Now though it was Christmas night, a certain tragedy hung about the getting of this supper.

For on Christmas night the young court pages, who generally messed together, waited on by a couple of rheumatic old henchmen, were admitted to the grand banquet where the Duke and his men dined, and had a table to themselves and certain young stable-boys, promoted for the occasion, to give them food and drink. Of these impromptu servers Podevin was one. Enormously had he looked forward to that! No doubt Duke Wenceslas was well enough known to his little army of palace-men, who worshipped him for his geniality and loved him for his thoughtfulness all the more because they feared his undoubted severity. Few there were who had not seen instances of both, the gentleness and the sternness. The soldier who had been wounded in his Duke's service knew the one; the turbulent Bohemian vassals had had unforgettable experience of the other. But the every day visits were a very different thing from seeing the Duke to-night, among his nobles, all in their state cloaks and coronets, armour and banner gorgeous over each man's head, hauberk and corslet glancing in the torchlight where

rows of men-at-arms stood behind the feasters! On a platform between the Duke's head table and the fire which blazed in the middle of the room, acrobats would be tumbling; in the gallery minstrels would be singing the old Bohemian songs to the weird national music. And the very sight of the huge trays of meat, and the henchmen striding down the hall with great tankards, foaming with ale, held at arm's length, would be a jolly spectacle! Podevin had looked forward to it for a month! And then suddenly it had all fallen through.

It was remembered that the old porter Zdrigna, rheumatic and helpless, could scarcely be left alone in the Gate-house even after his supper had been served. Messages might have to be sent from the Gate to the castle; and anyhow, he would be lonely on this Christmas night, abandoned in his little room in the round gate-tower. And yet, every one had his task assigned him. Well, the pages must do with one servant less. A volunteer was asked for. No one offered. Who would give up the blaze and the acrobats and the ducal festival

to spend a dull evening with a short-tempered old porter? No one offered: each hoped he might not be chosen. Suddenly, to his disgust, Podevin remembered part of the sermon old Paul, the castle chaplain, had preached that morning—not very much of it, but enough to make him uncomfortable.

Paul had preached, of course, on the birth of Christ. He had reminded the Duke and the court that not yet for half a century had the kingdom been called Christian. "Your grandfather, Sir," said he to Wenceslas, "was the first Christian Duke, and ever since then your people have been trying to learn what it means to have Christ for King, and it has been your duty to act, before their eyes, as Jesus Christ our King would have acted." (It was guessed, afterwards, that the reason why Wenceslas had refused to use the title of King which had been offered him that year, was that in his heart of hearts he liked to think that the greatest title was reserved for the supreme King of Bohemia, as of all Heaven and Earth.) "And you," Paul had said to all the people, "are learning from the Model put before you, that the

real king is not the proudest, or loudest, or most warlike, but the one who uses his high powers to help and serve the better; just as Jesus Christ, from the very beginning was not selfish, but made himself little and lovable, and beautiful, that people might willingly come to Him and so let Him help them the sooner. If you want to imitate that King, be as unselfish as you can; give yourself up; be patient; be strong to work for others."

Podevin, like the good little boy he was, had made up his mind to do as he was told —not least, one must confess, because Wenceslas, whom he adored, had met him that morning, and pulled his ear, and told him not to forget the sermon: but so far today he had found little opportunity of practising Paul's lesson. Only once, during a snow-fight (not as successful as it might have been, since it was freezing too hard for the snow to bind properly) he had had a hard struggle for his temper when a small scullion put a handful of snow down his neck. Down his neck! and a mere scullion! there was the sting. But he paid him out in all good comradeship, fair and square snowballing,

and they parted friends for life. But the general good-humour of Christmas day made every one so pleasant that really you hadn't a chance to be unselfish . . . till suddenly, here was the chance, and Podevin didn't like it at all. But he stepped forward pluckily, and offered himself, and the sergeant-at-arms took his sacrifice disgustingly as a matter of course, while the other stable lads wondered why the young fool hadn't waited till somebody let him in for it, instead of losing the whole evening's enjoyment of his own accord. However, *they* were none the worse for it, and at five of the evening, with their faces polished by their vigorous Bohemian mammas, and their sturdy limbs packed into leathern suits with fine red girdles, they filed into the big hall very hot and nervous, but determined to enjoy themselves before the evening was out.

Podevin, in his ordinary cloth jerkin and tanned leggings, watched them disappear, and his heart sunk considerably as he turned to fetch the old porter's rabbit-stew. But after all, the supper (of which the porter

gave him his good share) was excellent in its way, and to it the old man added sundry messes of his own concoction, cooked in the saucepans which lived in the chest where he also stored his best set of armour and his big festival prayer-book. But the boy, who was a soldier at heart, gulped down his supper fairly quickly, and began asking the old ex-sergeant to tell him of his military career. Zdrigna was so overjoyed (not to say amazed) to find some one anxious to listen to his stories that he began with right good will; only somehow his tales soon drifted round to the subject of the Duke, of whose early life the boy had only vague ideas. Out on the hill-farm where till recently he had lived alone with his mother, lately dead, news came rarely and in driblets; here in the castle, gossip about His Grace was considerably discouraged.

"My father," said Zdrigna, "was a man-at-arms in the service of the blessed Duchess Ludmila (Lidoslava she was called then), and he was with her when she came to Bohemia after marrying the Duke's grandfather, Borzivoj."

"Was Saint Ludmila the Duke's grandmother?" said the boy, open-eyed.

"Of course," said Zdrigna, "and my very good mistress."

The boy stared, thinking how odd it would be to have a grandmother to whom you prayed in Church, and who had her picture with a lamp before it at street-corners, and yet who had put you to bed when you were little (as his grandmother had done for him), or who made the soup. In fact, he realized suddenly that Saints were real people, who walked and ate and talked, and might be a relation of yours, if you only knew. . . .

"And old Father Paul was her chaplain," said the porter.

Never had the boy guessed that Father Paul, whom privately he had thought rather a silly old man, had been mixed up with real living Saints. And he had heard his Mass only that morning! How could you be sure, thought Podevin, that Paul wasn't a bit of a saint himself? And Podevin's surmise wasn't far wrong.

"But I knew the Duchess, mind you," went on the porter, "before she was a

Christian. A tremendous one she was for praying to the old gods—whom the devil take off with him to hell!" said he, with sudden devoutness, crossing himself rapidly half a dozen times. "For ever inventing new things, she was, in their honour; and faluting about in that vineyard of hers—you didn't know, boy," he broke off suddenly, "that before Duke Borzivoj there weren't any vines in Bohemia? Well, it was King Swatopluk of Moravia who sent him the first cask of wine we'd ever tasted, and nothing would please the Duchess but setting up a special vineyard to get wine from for her sacrifices. And between you and me, my lad," said he, lowering his voice, "I believe it's because of that first devils' vineyard that the Duke, God bless him, works that bit of a vineyard near the palace with his own hands, and there's that bit of a field by it that he works too; and that's where the wine and the bread come from that Father Paul uses every morning at Mass. And they do say, that it's the Duke that makes them with his own hands, grinding the flour and all the rest of it at night

—God bless him," he repeated, lifting the fur cap he wore even indoors.

"Well, her good husband got her into the Church, and turned out of Bohemia they were for a short time along of the change in religion; but God brought them back, and Borzivoj made a Saint of her, a bigger Saint than he was himself, and that 's saying a lot. And I suppose the Duke's son Wratislas thought he'd do the same thing, and married Drahomira, that 's the mother of our Duke, when she was a pagan, just to make a Christian out of her. But i' faith," said the old man, nodding at Podevin, who was listening, all ears, "it 's no wonder, in my opinion, that Duke Wratislas died when he was only three and thirty! It 's as much as your place is worth to mention it, but it wasn't long before Drahomira began to show the devil she was. And the nobles were sharp enough to send off their little son Duke Wenceslas (he was only eight when he succeeded to Duke Wratislas) and his brother Boleslasand hissister Przibislava to their grandmother to look after, just to keep 'em away from their mother. And

that's a sad thing, young 'un; to have to keep clear of your own mother because she's a devil from hell, and wants only one thing in life, and that's to destroy the Christian religion wherever she finds it. But Boleslas took after his mother. Threw over his religion, he did, and just to please her: and she made up her mind *he* should become the next reigning duke, not Wenceslas. There's a ghastly mother for you," said he, gravely taking a tremendous pull of ale. "What do you think of one who beats her own son black and blue? Well, here's one who tries to murder her son's soul, and that's as much better than his body as gold is than chaff, and don't you forget it, young 'un." From which it will be seen that Zdrigna, who had been a hard fighter and a hard drinker in his day, was not without his piety. "And after that," went on the old man, learned in religious politics early indeed in history, "she tried to get rid of the priests. Bad King and no priests, or rotten ones, and the people's done for, young sir. But Lord, the last thing she did!" shouted he, banging his fist on the table.

"I'll tell you," he continued, "though don't you dare to talk about it. When Drahomira saw that the boys were beginning to grow up real Christians under St. Ludmila's care, she sends a furious letter to the old Duchess, and 'Give 'em up to me,' she says. Well, she was reigning Duchess, and the boys had got all the education Budecz could give 'em, and so back they had to come. But that blessed Saint knew that she had only one thing to look for, now that the two young dukes and their men were out of her neighbourhood, and that was, death at the hands of the wicked young Duchess. For I suppose the people had been getting accustomed to her, during those years, and after all she had the money and the men, and then perhaps she grew a bit reckless and thought she could stick at nothing. Anyhow, off goes the blessed St. Ludmila to her castle at Tetin, where the old priest Caïch who baptized her lived, and 'I've got but a few days to live,' says she, as quiet as you or me, and she kneels down and makes her confession, and next morning the old priest gives her Viaticum.

And sure enough, next night when she was praying in her room, the door bursts open and in rushes Tumia and Gomo—you know old Gomo? him that feeds the pigs behind the castle; that's him. They'd left a whole regiment in the court, and they'd bound old Caïch and left him locked in the chapel. And now they were going to kill her."

"*Kill* her?" cried Podevin.

"They were, young 'un," said Zdrigna.

"What, two officers and a whole battalion against an old woman like that? The *cowards*!"

"The devil is always a coward," said the old man slowly. "Well, kill her they did. But not at once. Gomo told me the story. She gets up, and she stands there in her long black dress as quiet and kindly as if she was reigning Duchess and welcoming her guests. There she stood, one hand on the foot of her Crucifix, steadying herself. And 'You're going to die,' they shouted, loud as they could because they were really half afraid already. At that she smiled a little. 'Have you come to tell me that?' she said. 'Our Lord died, and His blessed

Mother; and all men die; and you will die, and I shall, in God's good time.' 'It's at our time and at our hands, you Christian hag,' they shouted, 'that *you've* got to die.' But she smiled again and looked at the hour-glass. 'God's good time,' says she. And the men stuck staring at her as if they were paralyzed. And down she kneels and kisses their hands. 'God's holy hands for me,' she says. Then she says, 'Now strike me with your swords, so that my blood may flow for Jesus.' And at that Name," said Zdrigna, horror-struck, "it was as if the devil stung them, and they tore off her veil, and they strangled her with it." Tears were in the old man's eyes.

Podevin felt quite sick. "The brutes!" he cried. "O the vile brutes! To strangle an old helpless woman like that. O how I'll hate old Gomo now, when I see him."

"No, no," said the porter, pensively. "It's a queer thing. Tumia died a drunkard; but Gomo's become a good man; a good man. And the Duke sits often with him, down there by the styes, and they talk of the Duke's grandmother, whom Gomo

killed. There's forgiveness for you. I couldn't have done it. But there, the Duke keeps pretty close to his old grandmother's steps, I take it, and you keep close to his, young 'un, and you'll do. They *do* say that if he had his way he'd be off to a monastery and pray and fast like she did. But here he stays as long as duty keeps him, God bless him for it."

"But how did he get back his dukedom?" asked Podevin.

Zdrigna chuckled, and then grew grave.

"He did what only a holy man would dare to do," said he. "He turned his mother out by main force. Sounds a bit wrong, doesn't it, son against mother? But then, you see, there'd have been a revolution anyhow—folks woke up after St. Ludmila's murder; and Drahomira's bad judges and bad idolatrous priests made the people get to hate her and clamour for their true Duke. Yes, there was fighting, Christians against the rest, and it ended in the defeat and exile of the Duchess. Don't look so puzzled, lad. There's times when a man must fight his nearest and dearest. And look you; when

once he'd got the land settled and his position strong, what does he do but bring his mother back and have her treated, and treat her himself, with the greatest respect and dutifulness. God grant he's not a bit too respectful and dutiful. I don't trust her one inch, and they say there's too many messengers passing to and fro between the Duchess' house and Duke Boleslas' place out in the country."

Just then a knock came at the door. Podevin opened it.

A beggar was standing there, his teeth chattering, his face blue with the cold.

"Bless my soul!" cried the worthy porter. "Come in; don't stand perishing there. What are you doing to be abroad to-night?"

The man came in. He was very poor and terribly respectful. "It's my wife, sir, said he, still shivering horribly. We were to have reached Prague early to-night. We had a petition—Duke Boleslas has taken our farm from us—and we thought the Duke couldn't refuse us help on this blessed night. And then we lost our way down by the river,

behind the palace, and my wife got taken ill —she 's ill down there, sir, I had to leave her, she was so weak. I left her in a shed which was open, on a heap of straw and rubbish."

"By the river?" cried Podevin, "behind the palace? But those are the pig-styes. You don't mean to say——"

"We took the first sheltered place we found, sir," the man answered. "She was too weak to go further."

"Off with you, my lad," cried the porter, "and tell His Grace. And as for you, my man, first warm yourself at my fire till a message comes back and we'll see what can be done."

But the man excused himself. His wife was too weak. He didn't dare to leave her. He slipped out almost before the porter realized he was going.

The Duke had ordered, not only that no single beggar should be turned away that night but even that he should be personally informed of all who came, that he might serve them, for the sweet sake of Christ who that day became servant and brother of us all. So Podevin made off across the court

to the great hall, and had a glimpse of the feasting after all.

It was late, and the merriment had grown uproarious. Drahomira and the Lady Przibislava had retired to their own quarters. It was a good thing that the skins were nailed loosely over the glassless round-topped windows, else the room would have been stifling. Some of the courtiers lolled back a trifle tipsy; the young pages were decidedly too noisy, and the scene was not as wholly pleasant as one might have hoped. Wenceslas was sitting back in his chair, a little tired, a little sorry that the holy happiness of this dear night should in the very least be tarnished by indulgence or forgetfulness of the Child whose birthday into suffering is the only reason that we dare rejoice at all. People sometimes said that he had a secret in his eyes; and certainly just now his thoughts seemed turned inwards, yet somehow he wore, together with his slight look of pain, an expression of real but solemn joy.

Podevin slipped easily along the wall, behind the drinkers. He dropped on one

knee beside the Duke, and told him the beggar's story.

Wenceslas rose.

"My lords," said he, simply, "I beg of you to enjoy yourselves in my brief absence. I have business of a few moments to transact."

The company rose, bowed, and returned to louder merriment as the door shut behind Duke and stable-boy.

"I shall take help to the sick woman myself," said the Duke shortly. "We need wood, bread, meat, and wine. And we shall want a lantern. Let the steward bring it here. Fetch your cloak and boots, and you shall help me carry it."

The boy went on his errand, returned, and found the Duke still there, with the victuals and lantern and wood beside him. The grief had faded from his eyes, and there was nothing there but a light which told that his secret, if he had one, was all of joy.

The Duke signed himself with the Cross and they went out.

"Let us go even unto Bethlehem," quoted he.

But just before they had lifted their burdens, the lantern door swung open, for the catch was loose, and the wind extinguished the light.

"Give it to me," said the Duke; and crossing the yard, he went to a little shrine under the great front arch, where a lamp burned before a Crucifix.

"This," said he, "is a light which never goes out." And he lit the lantern from it. Podevin was a little astonished: was it perfectly reverent to do that, he wondered? He wouldn't have dared! And besides, he was sure he'd seen that lamp before the Crucifix put out, before now; what did the Duke mean? But he was so bewildered by the whole incident, the sudden change from porter's lodge to banquet-hall with all its glare and noise, and now this pilgrimage all alone with the great Duke . . . his eyes grew wider and wider, and he said nothing at all.

"*In lumine tuo videbimus lumen*," murmured the Duke to himself. "In Thy light shall we see light. Now for it, young man."

And the last great gate swung open. Podevin was for picking up the faggots, but the Duke stopped him, saying that he would carry the wood. And as he said that, smiling at the boy, he seemed so strangely glad, that Podevin, without in the least knowing why, found tears in his eyes.

The door creaked back behind them. Here for the first time they met the wind full, and felt the intolerable cold. The immense fields of snow made the night so light that the lantern would not really be wanted till they reached the dark shed, and there could be no mistaking the way. Still, with that cruel shrieking wind piercing his fleecy cloak like so many blades of ice, Podevin involuntarily cowered and hesitated.

"I will go first," said the Duke. "Walk behind me; keep as close as you can, and try to walk in my footsteps."

Podevin dropped behind, a little ashamed. But there was no denying that the wind had been agony, and that the absolutely flawless levels of snow had somehow scared him. He did not dare to tread upon that untravelled surface, nor, for all the brilliant

reflection of the crystals, go forward first into the dark. But now the Duke walked before him, and left a clear track of printed snow, and in the Duke's steps Podevin strove to tread. Whether it was that the Duke's broad figure sheltered him from the wind, or whether the exercise sent the blood circulating faster, or from whatever cause—for Podevin thought it was something more wonderful than just that—he felt the cold no more. The night was crisp, keen, exhilarating, as frosty weather always is, but the pain was gone; he felt he could walk on for ever, and right happily, behind the Duke. And though he was just a healthy small boy, and not given to fanciful day-dreams, nor night-dreams either for the matter of that, he suddenly had the idea that all before and behind them, and on either side, a great troop was moving, keeping pace with them, invisible as the wind, and yet white as the snow; and the Duke, too, to the boy's fancy, seemed pure white, exquisite and simple as a child's soul or an angel, a spirit wholly innocent and lovely. And all were singing inaudibly a song of in-

tense happiness, the words of which Podevin could not hear, but in which, without understanding, he joined. And suddenly they found themselves by the pig-huts, and went straight to the only one which Podevin knew was empty. There the beggars must be.

It was in two divisions. "Wait here," said Wenceslas. And he put down the wood and passed into the inner part of the hut with the lantern.

When the door shut behind the Duke Podevin was left, of course, in absolute darkness. And the silence, too, was absolute. Time, for him, stood still. He felt as though he was holding his breath, as if all the world held its breath, and was waiting. Suddenly he went down on his knees and prayed, without knowing why. Somehow he felt as if, by doing that, he was joining with all that silent, breathless world, for he was not asking in his prayer, but just worshipping. First, he said very slowly the Hail Mary, resting very long on the word *Hail*; and then, over and over again, whispering it for awe, "*Blessed* art thou amongst

women . . . *Blessed—blessed.*" After that he said the Our Father; and then, repeating this too, and always louder, and standing up at last, so great was the effort of his earnestness, "Through Jesus Christ Thy Son, our Lord." And as he stood, he felt as if a hand pushed him by the shoulder into the inner room.

The lantern lit it very faintly. On a heap of rubbish, in the shade, a man (the beggar, doubtless) and a woman were sitting. In the flickering circle of lantern-light Wenceslas was kneeling, holding a baby in his arms, and looking at it. Podevin fell at once on his knees at the sight of the Duke's face. Wenceslas bent over the child; his face was so happy that it seemed to shine with actual light, and yet tears were raining down his cheeks. He knelt almost motionless, sometimes closing his eyes for a moment, sometimes just drawing in his breath, swaying slightly for an instant backwards and forwards. It was as if the great army which had followed over the white snow was massed there in that tiny room, only silent now; wonderful still thoughts like steady

flames of adoration before the Eternal God.

Wenceslas looked up and saw Podevin, who drew himself nearer on his knees.

"Kiss him," said Wenceslas, and Podevin, bending over the little baby, kissed it.

Just then he could think of only one thing —its tininess. Tiny little face, tiny pink fingers curled up into the little hands. . . . Podevin was only a little boy himself, but this baby's tininess made him almost frightened.

Laughing gently, Wenceslas held out the baby to its mother. As she leaned forward to receive it she looked into Podevin's eyes. He felt two things: first, that that look had penetrated him as light floods through and through the air; and next, that in that look he had seen heaven; and, bewilderingly, when she clasped her little baby into her bosom, where it nestled as into its dear home, that she clasped him there too, and to his astonishment he found himself saying "Mother," softly to himself, although his own mother, as we said, had died.

Wenceslas rose briskly. "Make a fire,"

said he. "To-morrow these good people shall be better lodged. To-night, in this warm hay and with a good wood-fire and this food, they will be well enough."

Podevin found himself bustling about the faggots and unpacking the meat and bread and wine, and almost before he knew where he was the door had shut behind him and the Duke.

This time he was brave enough. He strode out manfully, and so happy and at ease did he feel, that he looked boldly up to Wenceslas and said, "Sir, may I promise to follow you, as your man, all my life? I will do my best to be faithful, I promise. Please, Sir, tell me to be your follower."

"Do you really want to go where I am going?" asked the Duke gravely.

"Please, your Grace."

"God helping you and me, you shall," said the other. "I with Christ, and you with me. *Ubi ego sum, ibi Minister meus erit.* Where I, there my servant. And I, by His grace, am His, and you are mine. And now I must set my face towards Jerusalem. And you shall come."

When they reached the castle Wenceslas, for a hundred yards, had been singing *Gloria in Excelsis* so loud that the frosty fields, for the wind had dropped, re-echoed.

Podevin never spoke much of that night's expedition, and even had he lived to hear the incident become a famous song (of which our dear old carol is one version), he could not have told you whether it had really been the Holy Family themselves that he had seen, or whether the Duke's spiritual sight was so clear that, in those humble folk he had recognized Our Lord actually present, realizing his words as literally true, "Inasmuch as ye have done it to the least of these my little ones, ye have done it unto Me." But Wenceslas had done more than realize that for himself: the force of his faith had driven the same knowledge into Podevin, and in the strength of that, Podevin followed Wenceslas to the end. For he believed at least that the Duke had learnt that night the certainty of his approaching martyrdom. As for the homeless family, next day Podevin himself saw to their housing, and a little

later they gained their petition, and Boleslas restored to them their farm.

* * * * * *

By what seemed irony of fate, it was the Duke's firm action in dealing with the flagrant injustice that had been meted out to this poor family which occasioned, in the long run, his doom. For, be as optimistic as we will, we must confess that men submit reluctantly to right; and the really just, really religious ruler is certain, sooner or later, to find his subjects restive. And Wenceslas was Duke of a country where the Christian Faith had but recently been implanted, and the reaction in his favour had only been partial, and could not prove lasting. The nobles had found the mingled anarchy and tyranny of Drahomira's usurpation intolerable, but they chafed under the strong hand of Wenceslas when they found their oppression and their exactions checked. So the hour was fit for the success of plots, of which Bohemia was full; but Wenceslas was far too noble-spirited to join himself in plots, or feel much else but contempt for

conspirators. The common people and even his immediate *entourage* of soldiery loved him; but the nobles had their own sworn men, and the will of the common folk, in those days, counted for nothing at all. The plots naturally centred in Boleslas, finally angered by the incident of the farm, and it was from Boleslas that, in the September of the year 936, an invitation came to Wenceslas that he should spend the vigil and feast of SS. Cosmas and Damian with him at his country house, near which those very popular Saints had a church.

Wenceslas was to arrive in time to sup with his brother on the vigil. On the journey he scarcely spoke a word, until, towards evening, with Podevin for page, he rode up to the house of Boleslas. Podevin never forgot that journey or that arrival. Boleslas and a number of courtiers came to the great gate to meet the Duke, and while Podevin was just holding the stirrup for Wenceslas to dismount, Boleslas, still at the top of the flight of steps, called out a welcome which was almost a sneer.

"Welcome, brother! And so the very

pious Wenceslas is not too pious to come to sup with us?"

"A Christian can scarcely be more pious than Christ," said the Duke, still in the saddle and smiling.

"Your Grace is not complimentary," cried a noble coarsely; "Christ only supped with publicans and sinners."

"No," rejoined the Duke; "when Christ went to His Last Supper all but one were Saints."

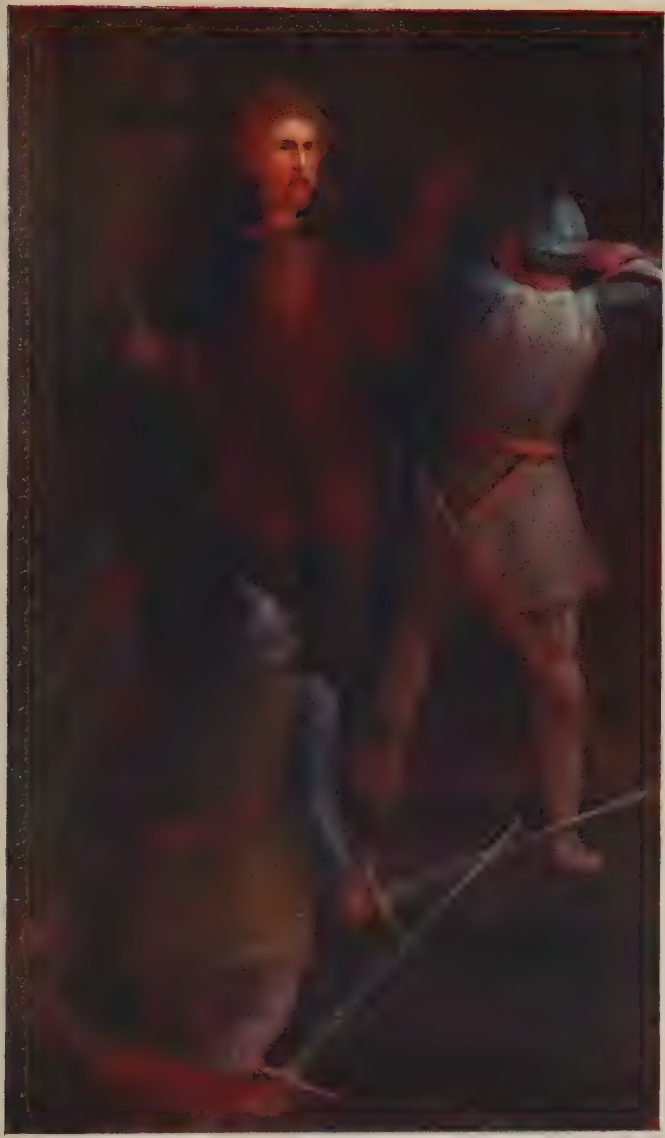
But just as he said that he had dismounted, and Boleslas was kissing him on the cheek. Boleslas turned pale: but Wenceslas passed inwards without another word. Only into Podevin's mind the whole scene was burnt in all its details.

The supper was, for every one, a strain. None knew what really was to happen at it. Afterwards, it was rumoured that Boleslas had ordered the man-at-arms who stood behind Wenceslas to stab him as he drank. They even said that thrice had the man moved forward to accomplish the murder, but either Wenceslas stirred and disconcerted him, or, turning to ask for some dish,

caught his glance and disarmed him by his kindly smile, or else a certain nervous horror had paralyzed the would-be assassin, and the opportunity passed. Others denied all this; and certainly the Duke, whether he suspected treachery or not, sat quite calmly through the meal, eating of everything with no seeming fear that it might be poisoned. Only once did he make an enigmatic reply. Boleslas was pledging him in a cup of wine, and, after wishing him good health, asked him if the wine was to his liking. "That cup," answered Wenceslas, "was very bitter." But he drank the goblet off, and then, "That is the last cup," said he, "that I shall drink." And immediately he rose and went to his room.

"May your Grace sleep well," murmured the bowing lines of courtiers; and they resumed their feast.

All through the night two of his body-guard stood sentinel outside the Duke's ante-chamber, and in the ante-chamber itself slept Podevin, across the Duke's door. The boy passed a restless night: he prayed, and then slept; woke, and prayed himself



The Martyrdom of St. Wenceslas.

to sleep once more. In the Duke's room the silence was complete, but when he came forth in the morning, so haggard was his face, and his eyes so dry and heavy, that it was clear that he had not slept at all. In fact, he had spent all that night in prayer. It scarcely needed revelation or vision of angels to tell him that the supreme temptation might be close at hand. It would have been easy, even at this hour, to strangle the danger by ordering the arrest of Boleslas on suspicion of intended crime; everything drew the Duke that way—the thought of his kingdom's fate were he to perish, of the priests once more expelled, the poor once more oppressed; but since his heart had ways of knowing what God willed which we can scarcely guess at, he prayed and remained silent.

It was very early that he rose; as he passed his door he necessarily wakened Podevin, who sprang up, dressing hurriedly in order to follow not many moments behind his master. Wenceslas was going to hear Matins chanted in the Church of SS. Cosmas and Damian; and Podevin, though the

Duke meant to go unattended, never dreamt, somehow, of staying behind.

To reach the church one had to cross the wide castle courtyard, on three sides of which strong walls rose high, almost windowless. The fourth side was filled by the church, which faced the gate. It was a wide building with a low-pitched roof surmounted by a square turret containing a bell. A long vestibule with a sloping roof ran the whole width of the church and rose to half the height of the façade. It was supported by seven pillars, and beneath it a flight of steps led up to the three great doors, of which the central one stood already open, its round arch showing blacker even than the shadow under the sloping roof of the vestibule. From the court a single point of light could be detected, where, at the extreme end of the church, a lamp hung before the Blessed Sacrament. Into this courtyard, then, Wenceslas descended very early on the morning of the twenty-eighth of September.

The sky was full of a clean, gray light. The sleeping air was so limpid that it might have been thought that only sin, waking

with the day, could sully the purity of this beautiful creation of God. One single bird was piping a clear morning song. And into this wonderful peace Wenceslas went out to pray, and he felt as though the keen freshness of that dawn washed from him the suffering and exhaustion of his vigil.

He walked forward from the castle, his eye fixed on the little lamp before the Altar. Suddenly, to his amazement, it vanished. With a crash the huge door was slammed to from within, full in his face, and the Church was barred. He stood still for a moment in the middle of the echoing court. Then, among the echoes, he caught a quick scuffle of steps behind him. Instinctively he flung up his right arm; it encountered that of Boleslas, and parried the downward sword-sweep that was to have killed him. He wheeled and faced his brother. Boleslas, a coward at heart, insignificant of build beside the Duke, and despicable at that moment to look upon, was unnerved at once by his brother's action, and struck wildly a second time. Wenceslas drove with his fist full force upon his wrist, and sent the sword

askew. It sliced the Duke's left shoulder, and then fell clattering to the pavement from the murderer's numbed hand. Quick as thought Wenceslas stepped upon it, and, for just one moment furious, he towered over Boleslas, eyes flashing, fist clenched and high.

"*I could crush you like a gnat,*" he whispered. Then, as Boleslas cringed before him, his rat's eyes dry with terror and his breath suffocating in his throat, there passed before the eyes of the Duke's soul the vision of that Example according to which he had striven to model his own life, and of the infinite Forgiveness which, from the Cross of shame and death, had forgiven him his sins, and, with him, the sins of a whole world. All that was asked in return was that Wenceslas should forgive when in his turn he too must suffer and die.

The Duke stooped, picked up the sword, and put it in his brother's hand.

"Here is your sword, Boleslas," said he. "You never could have meant to kill your own brother?"

And he turned to mount the steps of the

closed Church. But the blood from the flesh-wound in his shoulder had run down to his feet, and his steps left red marks upon the stones.

Boleslas, almost mad with rage and shame, recovered himself.

"To me!" he shrieked passionately.

From their posts of ambush, lurking soldiers sprang out on every side into the court, and the Duke, with one hand on the great iron ring of the door-latch, turned to face the death that was certain now.

Seven swords whirled down on him at once, and a rain of blood streamed over his face. He sank to his knees upon the steps, still holding the iron ring, and still half turned towards the court. Just before the swords crashed down again, through the pouring blood and the rushing shadows, he could just see the castle gate swing open, and his little page race wildly towards the Church.

His murderers saw the Duke smile quickly, and then turn towards the locked door and immediately sink prone.

But our Lord Jesus Christ, standing up

from His throne in Heaven, opened to Wenceslas the door to a diviner Temple and an imperishable Throne.

* * * * * *

The hours passed silently over the dreadful courtyard where no one dared to go. It was wholly empty save for the two corpses lying on the Church steps, Duke's corpse and page-boy's, since at the very last the assassins, who had wholly failed to drag the weeping lad away from the body of the master whom he adored and to which he clung, had struck him down and left him dead, mingling his blood with that of Wenceslas, and, in the mystic chalice of the world's undying sacrifice, with that of their common Lord and model. Not many years later, the boy's relics were laid near those of the Duke and his holy sister the Princess, and his fellow page-boys prayed to him as to a martyr; and the old porter prayed too, remembering that Christmas night when, for love of the Holy Child, the boy's unselfish little act was done, which had brought him near to Wenceslas then and for the rest of his life, and in his death.

But for the present round his dead body the air was shining with the pale gold glory of the autumn sunrise, and the whole court seemed joyous with the melodious song of birds.

ALEXAMENOS WORSHIPS GOD

ALEXAMENOS WORSHIPS GOD

These are they that have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

ST. JOHN'S *Apocalypse.*

JUST above the old cattle-market by the banks of the Tiber Alexamenos lived with his father and mother sixteen hundred years ago. It was a miserable place, though with magnificence within a stone's throw on every side. One had only to peep out of the lower end of the slum where the small boy lived, to see, towering above the stalls and two little round temples of the market-place, the gigantic end of the Circus Maximus. It stretched away, a mighty oblong, towards the city walls, with tiers of seats on either hand sloping towards the clouds, one pale mosaic of human faces on days of the great games, when the sand grew wet and crimson, and little boys came running in, after each murderous bout, to sop up the hideous pools, and put down

white sawdust and fresh sand. Alexamenos, since his family was Christian, had never seen that; nor indeed had he ever entered the grand old theatre of Marcellus which abutted on the other end of his slum, in the gay district of fine theatres curving one behind the other with many another circus, till they crossed the Tiber and the great town ended. A third side of his home was overshadowed by the temple of Jupiter Capitoline, where the colossal image in its courtyard could all but look down the Tarpeian rock, with its ghastly memories of traitors flung from its brow, brains battered out upon it, and shattered corpses left below. Behind and around that, once more, were other great temples, palaces, and baths, and the noisy, gaudy Forum; and between them all, more slums, black, congested, pestilential; and splendour and squalor alike were man's work and the heart of the greatest empire man had made. Only on the fourth side of the boy's narrow home could he see God's handiwork, the Tiber, yellow and thick, no doubt, just as Vergil saw it, and as we see it, but still, God's creation, flowing

along in its own God-given course from the imperishable mountains into the eternal sea.

A Roman slum consisted not so much, as do ours, of narrow streets and blind alleys, but of little islands of houses, almost touching one another, and each forming a hollow square. You entered a narrow passage from the street, on to which scarcely any windows looked, but where the many-storeyed houses were piled to rickety heights with almost unbroken walls. Sometimes a crazy outside staircase led down from the top storey into the street, an escape in case of frequent fire, but which tended merely to substitute death by broken limbs for death by burning. Once inside the court you picked your way among great mounds of refuse to stairs—sometimes mere ladders—which led to the various galleries running round the "island" at different levels, on to which the rooms occupied by whole families opened. Brilliantly coloured rags floated from the gallery-railings; spires of violet-coloured smoke of an extraordinarily sharp smell curled from the many rooms where all sorts of grain and vegetables were being cooked in bacon-fat, with a plentiful

admixture of garlic. Any scraps or refuse there might be were flung over the railings into the court, and that was what made the great ill-smelling mounds which festered there, and in which miserable creatures, scarcely human to look upon, and too poor to live even in a slum, came and picked and poked by night, living—and too often dying—on the horrors which they found there.

On the third level of this pit lived Alexamenos. His people had always been very poor indeed, and since they had been Christians, poorer still; for the Roman Church, in spite of all its generosity, could not cope with all the misery which drained into the City. Their room was, however, clean; but it was almost empty, and not so gay as some others no less poor, seeing that it had in it none of those little statuettes of the gods, and crowns of flowers and tinsel, which pagan devotion cherished. The ceiling was painted a rather sickly blue; and beneath the cornice ran a pitiable little frieze of impossible pink roses tied with ribbons, and at each corner sprawled a fat little genius with yellow hair. An old actor had had this room,

and had fancied he would like it on the model of the bath lounges where he lolled away his old age, and had painted in the frieze. But in these dingy surroundings the frivolous ribbons and roses looked merely silly, though they served as an excuse for exacting a few additional coins by way of rent.

In the window, however, hung a wicker-work cage containing a cockatoo, and this stood for the other half of the life of little Alexamenos.

The cockatoo had originally belonged to a very aristocratic young lady, Claudia Melania, the daughter of a senator whose house was on the Esquiline. Claudia was almost a year younger than Alexamenos, that is, a little over eight. Her nurse was his mother's sister, and once a month the poor washerwoman of the Velabrum was allowed to visit her sister at the great white palace high up among the gardens of the Esquiline. There Alexamenos had met Claudia; and because the Claudii too were Christians, and really very noble people into the bargain, who had no need to stand upon their dignity, the little boy was allowed to

see quite a lot of her, and in a stately Roman way she made close friends with him, and played hide-and-seek in the garden, and showed him all her treasures. Because he was a boy, he hadn't been able to get excited about her dolls, except to the extent of taking a respectful interest in the crocodile whose mouth worked with a string. But he had gone wild with excitement over the cockatoo; it made such a diabolical outcry when it was tormented that he yearned to add it to the other attractions of the court. But he dared not ask for it. At last, however, it came into his hands because Claudia's father found himself quite suddenly exasperated by an unusually protracted screaming bout (occasioned by Claudia's having insisted on its beak being painted a vivid pink—and a slave was found who loved her enough to do it), and the old senator ordered it to be removed. It was handed over to Alexamenos, and his slight nervousness when he came really to close quarters with the frantic fowl half made the absolutely fearless little Roman lady fancy that he was not quite as brave as she liked her friends to be.

And in fact Alexamenos was not brave. Was that because he had a good deal of Greek and even Asiatic blood in him, into which generations of slavery had infused all sorts of yielding, shrinking instincts? Was it that the old Roman blood itself was too hopelessly diluted by now, and thinned too by long years of alternate pampering and starving at the hands of frightened or cruel rulers? Or in that deadening slum-life was it too much to expect a strong soul in an undeveloped, underfed body? Was it that in spite of everything the Christians had in them something of that timidity which their enemies thought they noticed, and which might be one quite natural result of the aloofness which they practised from so much of the life going on all around them? For though in the long intervals between great persecutions the Christians came forward and mixed in public life, yet there was much in which they could not share—the gorgeous worship of the Gods, the luxurious life of bath and circus and theatre; many of them went further, and objected to military service, had felt it impossible to take any part in the

offices or functions of a State which recognized, however vaguely, the divinity of the Emperor; had refused even to wear garlands at festive meals, thinking it unseemly for the servants of a thorn-crowned Master to be diademed with flowers. "Unbroken melancholy," was the description of the life of the great royal convert, Flavia Domitilla, by whose name went the Catacombs on the Ardeatine Way down which, since it lay so near their quarter, Alexamenos and his father often used to travel.

It was these Catacombs which Alexamenos hated worse than anything else. And it was by the irony of fate that his father was constantly taking him there, in the hopes that the glorious spectacle of the Martyrs' sepulchres might wake up the Christian enthusiasm which he could not but see was somewhat lacking in his son. But unfortunately the small boy had long ago been told a story which had made him frightened, once and for all, of the underground galleries. The Christians had, for their history, mainly a record of persecutions; and the name of Nero was still a word of horror for them,

and stories and fables about his life and death had still a ghastly fascination. Alexamenos had been brought up on these; and the death of Nero was still vivid in his imagination. He had been told of the Emperor's life of unparalleled splendour and cruelty; he had heard read St. John's Apocalypse, and had been told that Nero was that horrible night-mare Beast, with the seven heads and the ten horns, there pictured; that Nero's Rome was the Woman, clothed in scarlet, flamboyant with gold and pearls, and drunk with the blood of the Martyrs of Jesus. Then he had heard of Nero's end, of the last weeks of despair, as news came in thick and fast of revolutions and mutinies; of armies disobedient, of mobs demanding his death. The last night came, when Nero received in an exquisite golden box, as befitted an Emperor, the poison he had ordered for his suicide; too frightened to take it, he had hurried out, shabbily disguised, into a town which was wakeful, though night had fallen. But the guards had deserted; and as he slunk, hustled and unrecognized, through his city's streets, he

knocked at the doors of his friends, but none were opened. Weeping with fear, he followed the slums down to the river; but he was too frightened to fling himself into the water. He returned to the huge palace: it was black and empty; the slaves had fled, stealing its treasures, even the poison in its golden casket. The silent palace terrified him: anything to get away! At last he met one or two boon-companions, men of low estate. They promised him a shelter, outside the walls, in a farm. He mounted a horse they offered him, and, in a cold drizzle which began to fall, the little band made for the Nomentan Gate. As they passed the barracks, coarse voices were heard, singing to the death of Nero and long life to Otho his successor. As they galloped out into the dark, a sentence caught them. "The Emperor must have fled—these men are pursuing him!" They galloped the faster for that. Suddenly, the Emperor's horse swerved, reared, and stood trembling. A corpse was lying in the ditch; the animal had scented it, and dared not pass. But as he reared, the handkerchief which Nero was holding before his face flapped aside, and a

passing guard had recognized the Emperor. Was all lost? for the moment, anyhow, the guard—loyal perhaps, in spite of all, or cynically unwilling to hurry the certain doom—merely saluted and passed on. But the horses were turned loose, and fighting their way through brambles which tore their clothes to rags, the men made for the little farmhouse. Once there, his companions told Nero to wait, while they made an entrance for him from behind into the cellar—they dared not use the ordinary door. They told him to hide in a disused sandpit. "I will not bury myself alive!" said Nero angrily; and waited there, in the cold rain and the dark, till they should return. That was where Alexamenos in imagination watched him, saw him even more vividly than as he lay moaning and tossing in the black cellar next day, till he was helped, by his companions, to a miserable suicide. Always he could see the great flabby face of the Emperor, glistening with the sweat of terror, yet set in a sudden spasm of foolish obstinacy when he refused the small indignity of hiding in the sand-pit. And so, when he

went to the Catacombs, built so often near or under sand-pits, and in one or two instances actually adapted from them, he felt in a passion of nervous terror, expecting every moment to meet Nero, seeing him now as the miserable fugitive, now as the scarcely more hideous Beast of the Apocalypse. Especially had he a positive loathing for the Catacombs of St. Agnes, a mile or two out along the very Nomentan Way down which Nero had fled to his death.

As often happens, it was a terrible sin, of the kind to which he felt himself so prone, but never thought he could actually commit, which cured him finally of that fatal cowardice.

Whatever might be the shrinking characteristics of some of the humbler Christians, it had certainly become clear to the rulers of the Roman Empire that the Church now formed a state within a state; that an Empire of souls stood face to face with the great organization over which they wished to consider themselves in absolute authority. That spiritual Empire told men that they were individuals each with his own con-

science; that every man was, for all his citizenship, as it were a little world in himself; or rather, that he lived in a world containing, in the end, just himself and God. To God, ultimately, he was responsible for actions and ideals: "Jesus is Lord," was the motto which he was to oppose to the motto, "Caesar is Lord." In every part of the Empire except Gaul, the supreme rulers, Maximian in the West, Galerius in the East, in Rome reluctant Diocletian himself, determined to do away with this state within a state, this divided allegiance, and to abolish Christianity. It was when the first murmurs of the gathering storm were making themselves heard, that Alexamenos sinned the sin which, in God's mercy, saved him.

He was playing on the Palatine with some Roman boys, when a game was proposed by one of them in which the prevalent unpopularity of the Christians made itself obvious. A burlesque of the Christian mysteries was to be performed; discreditable incidents were to take place there: then, small boys would play the part of the police, and raid the sanctuary; the Christians would

fly, be pursued; tried, if captured, and condemned. A free fight usually ended these amusements of little Roman gutter-boys. Alexamenos was the only Christian there, and no one knew it. He was in a panic; he dared not share in the burlesque of all he held most holy, and yet he dared not declare his faith; and when once he had let slip the occasion of at least making off, he got more hopelessly entangled in the circumstances, and at last the whole sad scene of St. Peter's denial was re-enacted.

Alexamenos had succeeded in playing the part of one of the police. He dared not think of what might have happened had he been chosen for one of the farcical acolytes—for celebrant even in that sacrilegious action. To make one of a band of five or six, and simply run after some scurrying small boys with shouts and yells, was after all no dreadful crime—he need call out nothing against the Christians . . . but just as the chase had begun, and the others were careering about the Square with cries of "Christians to the lions! Christians to the lions!" an elder boy, a pagan, who knew and had no love for him,

passed on his way to the forum. "Why," he yelled, "you're chasing the wrong men. Alexamenos is a real Christian! Ho for Alexamenos!" And he left his barrow and began to run.

Alexamenos was caught in a moment, and before he was aware of his own words, he had called out that he was not a Christian. After that he dared not retreat. Chilo, who had denounced him, jeered and twisted his wrists. The boy shrieked with the pain and repeated his denial.

By a deplorable coincidence Claudia, who was ill, was just then being taken in her litter to visit a doctor, who lived near the Palatine. At the cry of "Christian! Christian!" the litter stopped, the bearers afraid that in some popular tumult their little mistress (since their liveries would be recognized and the litter known as Christian) might be hustled and insulted. Claudia, on the other hand, quite brave enough not to think of herself, insisted on going closer to the little crowd, hoping, like the courageous little girl she was, that the men might be able to help a Christian at need, and she

put her head out between the curtains just in time to hear poor Alexamenos, who was really being tortured, scream, "I'm *not* a Christian! I tell you I'm *not*. Curse them!" Horror-struck, she burst into tears and the litter was hurried home.

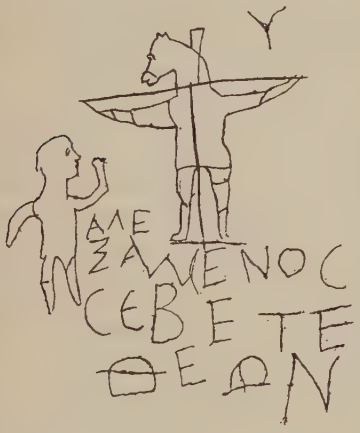
But Alexamenos was put on his trial. This was better sport than mere make believe! The boys pulled him along to the stone benches which ran along one side of the little square; and, leaning against the white-washed wall, a self-constituted judge examined Alexamenos, and the evidence of Chilo was accepted as proving him guilty. He was given one more chance. If he formally ridiculed his religion, he would be let off. If he obstinately stuck to his denial, he should be chased again and have more wrist-twisting and be ducked, in the end, in the Tiber. The poor lad, quite exhausted, dazed with fright, promised everything.

Then Chilo, with a hard piece of brick, scratched on the plaster of the wall the dreadful little picture which was discovered not very many years ago, and which can still be seen. He drew a cross, and beside it a

figure with its hand raised in worship; and on the cross he drew a human figure, and this figure had an ass's head.

"Now," said he, "you just write under that what I tell you."

Alexamenos took the brick.



"Write, Alexamenos worships God."

"Never," cried the boy, and flung down the brick. At once his wrists were seized, twisted, and hard fists pounded at the strained muscles of his arm.

"I'll write it!" cried he, miserably. And, moaning with pain and fear, he wrote under

the blasphemous crucifix words which, in their bad Greek and clumsy lettering, still survive:

"Alexamenos worships God."

Then they let him go despairingly home.

* * * * * *

For some time after this perhaps there were no two more unhappy people in all Rome than Claudia and Alexamenos. To both of them it seemed that Alexamenos had committed the worst crime that could possibly have been committed, and partly because southern children feel things earlier and perhaps more deeply than do we northerners, they neither of them could stop thinking of it and grieving about it. Everything, too, joined in keeping it in their minds. The persecuting edicts began to appear. Dreadful stories of martyrdoms in the provinces poured in. Whole congregations had been burnt in church; consignments of beasts for the amphitheatres became large and frequent. The question arose once more of how the lapsed should be treated. There were a few terrible instances of traitors in the camp—a new Judas might be feared

in the congregation at each Mass. Alexamenos told himself, in exaggerated grief, that he was a "lapsed," *he* was a Judas. At last the famous fire in Diocletian's palace broke out; the Christians were accused; persecution blazed freely. Claudia's father held firm to his house, trusting that senatorial rank and wealth and position would carry him safely through. Besides, his little daughter was worse; with the horrible vision always in her eyes of the little boy's apostasy, she could not throw off the sickness. It returned and returned, in dream and waking thought, that dreadful cry of cursing uttered by the boy she had played with and had grown really to love, and it rang constantly in her ears. She had never seen him again since that day; he had not dared to come near the Esquiline, even though quite unaware that his sin had been witnessed by Claudia.

Alexamenos, on the other hand, though he too could not forget what he had done, felt somehow that the very fact that he had offended once, so horribly and unexpectedly, made it impossible for him to sin again in

that way. He had found himself capable of what he had never imagined doing; but he had told the dreadful secret to a priest of the Catacombs on the Ardeatine, and now lived with one thought in his mind concerning the future—that some great Christian deed must atone for the past. Perhaps he had actually *needed* that one fall in order to rise to what God wanted of him.

Not that he felt any great change in his character. He felt sick with fright when his father told him that in consequence of the fierce feeling against Christians which was growing in the Velabrum, the family might have to leave Rome, and even hide for a day or two in St. Domitilla's Catacombs, as others had done before, if they could not immediately find a refuge elsewhere. One first step, significant of future changes, was that the stairways down into the Catacombs were now broken to pieces, and the shafts filled with sand, so that the pagans who knew these public entrances should be no more able to see them. New approaches were dug, masked in distant sand-pits.

The day came at last when Alexamenos'

father decided to go to the Catacombs, and there hide at least until he could get away to the country. Alexamenos was to go with him. The boy's mother was to be given shelter in the Claudian Palace, where her sister lived. The palace, already too full, could not house more.

On the day of the separation Alexamenos felt as though this was to be the opportunity for which he prayed. Bravely enough he went off with his father by way of the Aventine, leaving behind him the very place where St. Paul on reaching Rome had lived with the Jews Aquila and Priscilla; and at his right the yellow flood of the Tiber. On that road were many catacombs, but the boy's father had come to be best acquainted with St. Domitilla's, and that was where, for the moment, the old Pope himself was hiding. So after about a mile and a half's tramp out of Rome, they reached the farm below which stretched, to the right of the road, the Christian cemetery. It was not large, but the galleries formed four stories, and even in the vestibules stood a number of sarcophagi. These marble sarcophagi seemed to

be what the very earliest Christians of all had put there; after one had passed from the vestibule where they stood, the shelf-graves were at first so disguised with paintings as themselves to look like the olden chest-tombs; only quite within the galleries were the ordinary tombs, shelves in the wall, to be found. The most ancient part of the catacomb was covered with graceful paintings; vines trailed over the roof, in which little winged angels fluttered; landscapes, too, were painted there, as though the dead, for whom alone these underground dwelling-places at first were built, would be glad to have round them the sights and memories of the life they had left. But these scenes were but rarely found; here, as elsewhere, the pictures on the walls were mostly allegorical; Daniel in the lions' den told that the dead need fear nothing from the demons who infested the dark valley through which they needs must pass; a man fishing told in child-like symbolism of the quest of Christ for souls; or, from another point of view, of the high destiny of the soul herself, which was to seek for Christ her beloved, repre-

"Stop the Thief!"

sented here, as so often, by the mystic Fish, was to seek and find Him and not let Him go. The Good Shepherd also was to be seen on these dark walls; and, further, the Eucharistic love-feast was spread, reminding them that whosoever had eaten of that Bread should not die for ever. And so in these melancholy labyrinths—narrow galleries making a maze of sharp angles and sudden recesses, and so narrow that two men could scarcely move abreast in this city of the dead, in which the walls were honeycombed with the niches where one above the other, like berths in some mysterious and giant vessel, the dead Christians slept behind sculptured slabs of stone—brooded an atmosphere not sad, not fearful, but cheerful, almost gay, very pure, and full of life. Alexamenos knew at once when he reached the real catacomb, even by the new entrance, by the peculiar smell of the soft stone in which the Christians quarried. The pure sand made a layer above; beneath, where the rock was cemented into hardness, was that red stone with which the Romans built; between, the easily-sawn tufa was unmistak-

able. Long shafts let down pale funnels of daylight: torches here and there flared ruddily, with trails of smoke blackening the roof and filtering through cranny or air-shaft into the upper world. In this pale and lurid light inscriptions were dimly visible, often the mere name, or else happy little prayers or benedictions—"Eternal light in Christ!" "Rest well and peacefully!" "He went to sleep in the peace of Jesus," "Sweet spirit, pure spirit, gentle heart, live in Christ!" And in the very middle of the Catacomb, on a lower tier, was the almost circular chapel where the Good Shepherd was painted, and where Christ, represented as usual as a young and beardless man, was seen in the midst of His Apostles. And daily here was sung the admirable Liturgy, by children as happy and light-hearted as any of those holy dead, while older men, in due season, chanted the passages from Gospel and Apostolic letter or from prophecy, and the aged Bishop of bishops himself celebrated the most holy mystery of Christ's Body and Blood.

On the very morrow of their arrival the

mother of Alexamenos came before daybreak on a frightened visit. She must absolutely see her husband before his departure; she had to relate that the Claudii were themselves terrified at last; they had despatched all their Christian servants to other houses and country farms; she must herself not return to the Esquiline, and if possible be gone from Rome that afternoon; old Claudius himself did not depart only because little Claudia was so much worse that there was fear of her dying that day: anyhow she could not be moved. Claudius begged the Pope's blessing for himself and his little daughter. It was decided by the affectionate old Bishop that not only should the child receive that parting blessing, but that, according to the custom, almost universal at one time in the Early Church, of giving Communion to children, the Blessed Sacrament should be sent to her at once, from his own Mass, which he was about to celebrate. The question remained as to who should carry it. In the same spirit the earlier Christians, who were not afraid to put Christ into the lips and hearts of innocent children, entrusted Him,

too, to the hands of others than priests, if there was cause, and the hands were pure. It was here that opportunity was given to Alexamenos. The authorities thought, no doubt, that a boy would excite even less suspicion than a man, who would be known to more, and reflected that Alexamenos could most easily win admittance to the Claudii's house. They readily, therefore, acceded to the suggestion that he should be sent. Himself he felt only one thing, and that was that his chance had come of doing the Christ he had denied a great service which should set things right again—an atonement, an action of faith and love.

So, in that dark Catacomb, Mass was sung; under the gloomy vaults where the Good Shepherd's face showed dim, Eucharistic torches burned around the altar, in front of which, clothed in white linen, stood the choir of little children. The Vicar of Christ on earth lifted the bread and the cup, and the miracle was worked, and Christ Himself was in the midst of His flock, and Bethlehem was there, and Calvary, and the flake of whiteness descended into the hearts of all

there present, and each man and woman and child shared, for a brief space, the awful guardianhood of Mary.

In a tiny glass receptacle, on which the heads of Christ and of St. Agnes were gilded, a crumb only of the heavenly Bread was placed—more would not be needed, even should Claudius wish to share in the Viaticum of his little daughter. This, by a gold thread slipped over his shoulders, hiding it beneath his tunic, Alexamenos set out alone to carry to the Esquiline.

Then began one of those Processions of the Blessed Sacrament which from that day to this, and from before that day, have never ceased. Such was that first most hidden journey of all, when the unborn Jesus was carried by Our Lady, with haste, into the hill-country to Elizabeth; only less hidden was that hurried flight into the sandy desert, when the Holy Family sought a new home in Egypt. Since then the office of Mary and Joseph has never been untenanted; and all through history we can watch the entire world becoming lined with holy roads along which the hidden Christ has passed, seeking

a home in the heart of Christians. Sometimes, where He pauses, He remains; an altar lamp is lit; a new centre is registered whence He may make His pilgrimages. Deepest of all griefs is it to watch the human hands which in all ages of the Church have quenched those lights—Henry's, in our own land, a coarse palm sweeping the lamps aside; Elizabeth's thin fingers, pinching the wicks into darkness; and hands, crueller, almost, than theirs, smothering the constellation that lately shone so glorious over France; chasing Jesus from His resting-place; leaving in hundreds upon hundreds of His chapels emptiness and obscurity alone. But keenest of all joys, surely, is the priest's whose hands have carried Jesus into far lands where He has not been before; who, looking at his map, can say that *there*, in the expanse of darkness, a new light is lit. Or keener still, it may be, is his who may relight a lamp that burnt bright in old days, and then was extinguished; as now, in England, lamps on all sides are springing into flame where Christ's procession has ended in a home. But from those homes

processions start again; and, to our mind, at least, far more marvellous than the great pageants of Corpus Christi, when with all royal pomp of banner and incense and vestment and thundered *Pange Lingua*, the King moves through his streets and squares, are the hidden processions, such as was that when Alexamenos carried Christ in the little glass vase, secretly, through crowds of money-makers and pleasure-seekers, who knew nothing of His neighbourhood. And daily into slums and courts of our great towns, as foul and pestilent as those of that old Rome, daily into the reeking courts of London, where babies starve and women fight and men go mad with drink and fever and sin, Jesus passes to and fro, pure, silent, holy, the food of souls. And after all, these little daily journeyings are only incidents, so to speak, in that immense procession of Jesus through the centuries, cleansing and purifying humanity, always more recognized by the souls He saves and the society He is converting; recognized usually by imperceptible degrees and knowledge, though sometimes (as when men suddenly realized that He

lived at churches and might be visited there, or again, that uplifted in the Monstrance He was willing to close their weary day with Benediction) with a great burst of enthusiasm and devotion. And in our own time, we have recognized what those first Christians felt, that His desire is that our meetings with Him may be multiplied, and our Communions daily. Daily, therefore, once again, like a shining shower of snow, the white flakes descend all over the Holy Church, on to the lips of Royalties who need His help as sorely as do we; on to those of priests and of religious whose life is meaningless if it be not bound up with His; of children who make their First Communion, while angels watch them; of boys fresh at the school where they are being trained for distant manhood; and of boys ready to step out, at last, into the wider and freer life. And at Universities, in industrial towns, in quiet country places, the same white flakes fall; and the Church keeps closer to Jesus till the procession shall cease altogether, having journeyed from Nazareth to the perfect New Jerusalem.

As long as Alexamenos kept to the Ardeatine road, all was safe and easy. The passers-by were relatively few, and only grew really numerous when the road joined with the Appian not far from Rome. But when he had entered the walls, by the Arch of Drusus, he felt safer again. Here the crowds were so dense that he was sure of passing unnoticed. He left the great Baths of Caracalla on the left, and might have turned to the right, making straight on the south side of the Colosseum to the Esquiline. Unfortunately he was not sure of those streets, and did not like to ask, feeling nervous with the precious burden on his breast. He meant to take two sides, therefore, of a triangle, going on to the Palatine, which he knew, and then turning to the Esquiline by way of the lower Forum.

A wave of hot shame crossed him as he passed by the fatal wall on the Palatine where the Crucifix was drawn. With eyes averted he was leaving the place, when suddenly the thought came to return and efface the drawing and inscription. He would do that when he was on his way

home, having first fulfilled his mission, so he told himself, but raised his eyes momentarily to make sure that the drawing was still there. As he did so they encountered the eyes of Chilo.

In three strides the bully was at his side. "Hullo, young Christian," he shouted, "come and give us another specimen of your art!"

Alexamenos turned like a hare and raced into a side street. He had gone some distance, and round several corners, before Chilo caught him up again. In that crowd it was impossible to drag the boy back, but Chilo kept up with his rapid step, determined at least to have some fun out of him. He tortured Alexamenos by jeering references to the Crucifix, and by blaspheming the Christian ritual, of which he knew only gross and lying legends. The boy hastened on, wildly anxious to reach the Esquiline. He grasped nervously at the glass vessel under his tunic.

"What 've you got there?" cried Chilo. "Let 's see."

"It 's nothing," answered Alexamenos,

clutching tighter than ever at the locket, revealing by his very grip that he held something.

"Let's see, I tell you," repeated Chilo, seizing him by the shoulder.

The boy violently shook himself free and started to run.

With a whoop Chilo made after him.

"It's a Christian charm! It's an amulet!" he shouted. "Here's a hunt." And he whooped, as though to hounds, and raced hard after Alexamenos.

The boy ran wildly, scattering children and pedlars who blocked the roadway.

"Jesus, Jesus," he was praying in his heart, "save Thyself."

Other boys by now had joined Chilo; Alexamenos was not stopped only because people thought it was a game, not noting the scared agony of the hunted boy's face.

Suddenly Chilo bethought him of a plan. "Stop the thief!" he shouted.

At once all were on the alert. Just as the slope of the Esquiline was beginning, and Alexamenos was bracing himself to one last effort which should carry him in

safety to the Claudian garden, a butcher, standing at his door, put out his foot and tripped the racing lad, who shot over the man's leg like a stone from a sling. His head came violently down upon the high kerb, and his skull was splintered by the blow.

The boys flung themselves on the little dead body, tore off the tunic and found the gold thread still round the shoulders. But in the fall the little glass vessel had been ground to powder against the boy's chest, and the blood, flowing from the wound, had soaked the tiny sacred contents, and they adhered, red and indistinguishable, to the cut flesh.

This was the Last Communion of Alexamenos, and in it he mingled his blood with Christ's, and hid His Body in his own torn flesh; and though he had never done any very great thing in his life, and had not been a Saint, and had committed at least one, as he judged it, most dreadful sin, I do not think it possible but that Jesus, at that last moment, acknowledged the little boy as a martyr, and admitted him to the

band of holy Acolytes in heaven, who had washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb, and serve Him day and night in His Temple.

ST. JOHN GUALBERT

ST. JOHN GUALBERT

So low, my Lord, I bow to Thee,
Whom too much love bowed lower for me.
Crashaw.

IF you were to be in Florence on Good Friday there is one church which you certainly ought to visit. It is the Santissima Trinità, on the right bank of the Arno, and everybody knows it.

If you went into it about three in the afternoon, you would find the crowd pressing towards the right-hand aisle; and when you reached that you could quite easily see over their heads by hoisting yourself up by the iron grating that screens off a side chapel, and, by holding to it, balance yourself on a high step. This is one of the advantages of an Italian church: it is your Father's house, and you feel at home in it; you know what you have come for, and you take your means to get it.

You look down the aisle, and you see a

brightly lighted altar, banked with palms and flowers, and above it a large frame with a purple curtain over it. Priests appear; the crowd sings *Vexilla Regis* to a solemn yet curiously cheerful tune; and the smoke of incense rises. Then the veil over the great picture rises, and you see the dim figure of a Cross, and, hanging on it, Our Lord.

It is a curious piece of work, with a Greek look about it. The whole Cross is nearly eight feet long, and from end to end of the arms well over six feet; the Figure is painted on a cloth stretched tightly over this frame, which, from the arms down to the knees, is considerably broader than above and below. In the spaces which this broad part forms on either side of Our Lord's body are painted Our Lady and Saint John. Above is the inscription; and at the bottom Mount Calvary is suggested by a little green hillock. Around the waist of Our Lord's holy image linen clothes fall, in a multitude of tiny folds, almost to the knees; the Body is terribly emaciated, bones and muscles showing clearly through the skin. The Head wears

a heavy gold crown, on which is written the word "LUX."

After the office of Tenebrae the Crucifix is veiled once more and remains hidden till next Good Friday.

It is a Crucifix which has been responsible for the doing of many strange things; and what it once prevented was strangest of all. It was old already when William the Conqueror was not yet born, and when German invaders were still strong in Northern Italy; and if you wanted to see where it was hanging then, you would have to leave the Church of Santissima Trinità, for that was not then built, and cross the Arno, and start a long climb up the hill on the further bank towards the ridge of San Miniato, overlooking the eastern part of the town; and before you came even as high as where Michael Angelo planted his famous fortifications, you would have passed, very likely, up just the narrow lane where, on Good Friday nearly one thousand years ago, the choice was given to a man to become a murderer or a saint. The Crucifix that you have seen made him choose the sainthood.

On the top of the hill stands the little Church of San Miniato, exactly where it has stood from a date centuries earlier, even, than the story of John Gualbert was enacted, though the earlier building was restored into the one you see by Bishop Hildebrand just after John's conversion, and sheathed with marble, as you see it, eight hundred years ago, no more. And if you turned your back to it, even all those centuries ago, you would not, no doubt, have seen just the same white marble and ruddy brick towers and domes in Florence just below you; still, there would have lain the town, all huddled roofs and narrow streets; the Arno flows swift and yellow as it always did; and on the horizon rose hills just as you see them, with bright green wheat-fields or dim misty terraces of olive trees, or crimson-gold stretches of ripe vineyards, and black-green cypress trees rising gloomily beside white cottages. And, above it all, there clustered Faesulae, the little town which one thousand years before was the stronghold of Catiline, and for a thousand years probably before that was the safe fortress place of half-savage

Etruscan tribes; and a thousand years after is still lying there for us to visit its old Roman Theatre, its prehistoric relics, and its Monastery.

John Gualbert looked across to it, that Good Friday, and his eyes lost sight of it in the flood of tears which rose to them—tears of rage, and not by any means of pity or devotion! An incredible thing had happened: his elder brother had been murdered, and by a man who had been, he thought, that brother's dearest friend. And, in the simple logic of that time, the natural duty devolving upon John was to avenge his brother Hugo, and John, who held himself sincerely to be a Christian, was out quite frankly searching for Andrew Alto, the murderer. That very night he had received a message that Andrew was in hiding in a farm on the further side of San Miniato, and he had set off at once with a band of men to hunt him. The house had been empty, and in the cold morning John, defeated and tired, looked out from the terrace below the Church, and for the thousandth time thought back over the whole story.

It was curious that John had first taken a dislike to Andrew in that very Church of San Miniato just behind him. Andrew was the son of a rich merchant who lived on the south side of the Arno, and somehow had made friends with the two sons of the great nobleman whose estates adjutted on his father's. He was a couple of years older than Hugo, who was the elder of the two boys, and probably his rather reckless disobedience to authority made him something of a hero in their eyes; anyhow, they became inseparable.

But one day they had climbed up together to San Miniato to see why the Church was decorated with streamers and greenery. It was, they found, for the consecration of a great Crucifix, given by some rich traveller; and they knelt down at the wooden barrier before it and recited *Paters* and *Aves* in a shrill tone. Hugo tired of his prayers quickly, and began to look about. Andrew prayed like an angel, his eyes tight shut and his hands clasped under his nose. At least, he had once heard his nurse exclaim, when he prayed like that, that he looked like a

seraph, and he was careful to take that position ever afterwards. In the cool air of the Church, the small John, who had tramped a long way for his short legs, grew drowsy and went fast asleep almost at once. Andrew prayed on. Suddenly a large fly hummed sonorously through the air, and alighted on the wooden bar just in front of Hugo. It walked solemnly along, lifting absurdly thin legs with a high-stepping air, and glazing its bulging eyes with an air of self-importance. Hugo was a sportsman. The temptation was too strong: his fist rose in the air, and came down with a bang on bar and fly together. The bar held firm.

"O Hugo!" said Andrew, startled and shocked. "And in Church!"

"Go and preach to the Jews!" retorted the conscience-stricken Hugo; and seizing John's wrist he dragged him towards the door. But John turned round, and saw a really odd occurrence.

For another fly, large as the first, hummed slowly down past Andrew's face; and the small boy, who was a boy every bit as much as Hugo, and who hadn't felt temptation in

the case of the first fly merely because, as we said, his eyes were tightly shut, succumbed completely and suddenly to the temptation now before him, and shot out an excited hand which grabbed the fly and had closed on it just as John looked round.

"O Hugo, *look*!" cried John. "Andrew's caught such a *huge* fly!"

"O *Andrew*!" cried Hugo, ruthlessly: "and in *Church*!" But just then an old monk came in, and saw, as he thought, two little boys making a noise in Church, and one little boy saying his prayers; so he hustled Hugo and John out of the porch, and took Andrew into the monastery, where he fed him on a large cake made in the shape of a cross and a bowl of very sugary wine.

And meanwhile the fly, released from the chubby, sticky hand, was trying to spread its bruised and crumpled wings, and stand up upon its broken legs on the stone floor of the Church. Later on a tidy lay-brother swept it away with the other rubbish which lay upon the pavement.

* * * * * *

Hugo had been put into a good temper

at once by having caught Andrew; and John was too little to remember much about this. But with Andrew it was different. He was a curious mixture of a boy. He really had been praying his best in the Church. His heart had been really touched, somehow, by the gentleness and love in the face of the great Crucifix which he had seen above him. And the catching of the fly had somehow jarred on him, and the reprimand slipped out before he was aware. Even his vanity, which made him pray in the position which he had heard might be considered seraphic, was half unconscious. And, as I said, *almost* before he thought of it, had his hand shot out and grabbed the wretched fly. He was given to yielding to sudden temptations like that in tiny things, no doubt; still, there wasn't much sign of self-control about him; and this particular instance of its lack had flicked his vanity most sharply. What a hypocrite Hugo must think him!

As you saw, Hugo did nothing of the kind; but Andrew, no doubt because he wasn't quite straight-minded himself, couldn't help thinking that Hugo was playing a part, and

really scorned him all the time. And no doubt Hugo had, without offensiveness, some of the airs and graces of a great noble's eldest son. However, Andrew stuck to him, partly because he was rather an unpopular boy and had no other friends; partly because his father (who was only too glad to see this intimacy kept up between his son and the great Gualbert family) had told him to; and partly because Hugo's admiration flattered him; and all those reasons belonged to the lower side of himself. Partly, however, he kept to Hugo because instinctively he knew that Hugo was worth keeping to. As for Hugo, he thought Andrew a splendid fellow; and, since he was always doing unselfish things on his account, he very soon liked him immensely; for in nine cases out of ten if you do kind things for any one you grow to like him in spite of all that you thought you saw against it. As for John, he didn't think much about Andrew at all, but went his own way like the ordinary boy he was.

But as you can guess, the lower side of Andrew had got the upper hand in this friendship. It had three reasons at least for

Andrew's sticking to Hugo, and the good side only one, and that but feeble. So little by little all real liking for Hugo died out in Andrew; and when once you begin to behave to a man you don't like as if he were your friend just for the sake of your own interests, you embark on a career of dishonesty which will end, sooner or later, in downright hate.

But the great Crucifix put a stop to all this chapter in the boys' lives.

Repairs were going on in San Miniato, and scaffolding was all round the Crucifix; ladders leaned against a small platform, high up near the Face, which was being restored.

The three lads passed, one day, on their way home from a long expedition on which they had been trying Andrew's new falcon. The falcon had not behaved well, and Andrew was in a sour temper.

"Let's go into the Church," said Hugo, "and see how the painting's getting on."

"We oughtn't to go into the Church," said Andrew quietly, "except to pray. And we shall be late for supper."

"I'm going to see how the painting's getting on," said Hugo obstinately. "Go

home by yourself if you want to, and get your silly supper."

But Andrew went in too, and hooked his falcon to a bench, and knelt to pray.

But his eyes soon went up to the platform where Hugo and John had climbed to; then he got hot and angry at the sight of the lads amusing themselves; then back came the picture of that scene, long ago, in the Church, when Hugo had laughed at him before that same Crucifix, for his hypocrisy in killing the fly after that rebuke. . . . His self-control slipped away fast; the first thing he did was to jump up and run to the ladder on the top of which Hugo was still perched. He would climb up it too, in spite of all he had said. Hugo looked down: "Hullo, Andrew," called he; "prayers finished? But don't you come up here you know!"

Just then the falcon, badly trained, and irritated by being left alone, fluttered and tugged at its jesses.

Andrew turned round and hissed to quiet it.

"O Andrew!" cried Hugo mockingly. "Playing with the falcon? and in *Church*?"

Something seemed to grip Andrew and shake him. He forgot everything; he was no longer responsible, in his passion, for anything he did. He gave a quick pull at the foot of the ladder, which slid on the paved floor. Quite awake now, and horrified with what he had done, he hurled himself against the slipping wood, but his weight was as nothing to stop it. The ladder flew out at the base, its head gliding smoothly down the wall. Shrieking, Hugo shot down from the little platform, from which planks fell with him, and he was caught between them and the ladder, his leg was bent beneath him, and the right ankle was crushed. He fainted at once.

For one dreadful moment Andrew knew, quite clearly, that he had wished to murder Hugo; then, looking up, he saw through the hole in the platform the repainted features of the Crucifix, standing out vivid from its dusky background; his eyes looked straight into those of Christ,

> Whose sad face on the Cross sees only this,
> After the passion of a thousand years.

* * * * * *

But Andrew had not killed Hugo. The ankle was crushed, and the doctors of that day could not set it right. Still, it was not amputated, and Hugo recovered far enough to walk about with a heavy limp, and often, at night, red-hot needles and hammer-strokes of pain tortured his right foot. Neither Hugo nor John had any notion of the part Andrew had played in the accident. John's back had been turned, and, when Hugo shrieked, Andrew was already struggling (at his own great risk, so it looked to John) to prop the falling ladder. Hugo had been too frightened and afterwards too ill to remember anything. In consequence, the sight of Andrew's constant and most self-sacrificing attendance on his sick bed touched him more than ever, and he grew more and more devoted to the older boy. John found himself practically supplanted by Andrew beside his brother, and drew off a little himself from his two companions. He was now, in Hugo's complete helplessness, practically the future head of the family. He grew older quickly; he lived much with the men-at-arms, and looked forward to sharing in the constant wars in

which Florence was engaged with the neighbouring cities, Lucca, Pistoia, Fiesole. A faint dislike for Andrew grew gradually, partly because his great inheritance was formed from the merchant-wealth which John despised; but he remained loyal to him for Hugo's sake, whom he loved, and who, after all, was the heir to the Gualbert name and estates.

Andrew, after some space of waiting upon Hugo, changed entirely. He thoroughly hated, now, the boy whom he had injured; he kept by him at first out of mixed remorse and fear; afterwards, out of pure selfishness, for the connection with the great nobleman was invaluable to him. And a course of selfish hypocrisy quickly dries up all that was ever sweet and wholesome and honest in a man.

So false a position could not be maintained. This is how it ended. Andrew, who was now twenty-one years old, had formed the plan of marrying Madonna Agnese Fabbroniana, the only daughter of a neighbouring nobleman, who was poor and avaricious also, and was only too glad to see his

fortunes built up again by marrying his daughter to a rich man, even were his wealth acquired from trading. For Andrew, a personal alliance with one of the noblest Florentine houses was of highest importance. But he was checkmated.

Hugo fell head over heels in love with the same girl, and Andrew was not so blind as not to perceive that he had no chance against a suitor who was as wealthy and far nobler than himself. His only hope was in Hugo's crippled foot. Would Agnese accept a limping lover? And he could not, once more, hope that she would refuse. She had never treated him with more than that perfect courtesy which she displayed towards all alike, and Hugo was undisguisedly happy in the belief that Agnese loved him.

Andrew brooded over this, and cursed the fate which should enable a white weakling to carry off the prize he had destined for himself. During the slow walks in which he lent his arm to Hugo, he developed for the lad, who trusted to his strength, a steady loathing which might prove fatal if, in any of the fits of anger or moroseness which now

became more and more common with him, he utterly lost his self-control. He thought of the fly, and laughed. Why couldn't he wipe Hugo from his way like that? He raged again when the incident of the ladder returned to him; why hadn't the thing been done properly, he chafed: why wasn't Hugo killed out-and-out, and he unimpeded?

The crisis came one day when they had gone further than usual, and were standing below San Miniato watching the wide view. It was a lovely evening, and the sky spread itself cloudlessly above Florence, a deep and tremulous blue beneath a veil of gold. The Arno flowed like burnished gold between hills of bronze and amethyst where the shadows gloomed them, and of a fairy gold with faint jewel tints where the sunset caught and transfigured them.

In the midst of this great peace Hugo confided to Andrew that Agnese had consented, and that nothing more was necessary but the consent of her father, which he certainly would give.

"I am glad of my pain," he said. "It is only right that I should have Purgatory

before Paradise; and after all, it will remind me that I am not quite in heaven yet, even when I am with Agnese."

Then it was that Andrew, blinded with passion, felt a wave of frenzy come upon him in which he stood impotent.

"You have robbed me," he shouted. "Curse you! you have robbed me!"

Hugo was thunderstruck; he had had no notion, no slightest inkling of Andrew's plan. Even then it seemed incredible that Andrew should really have hoped to marry Agnese.

"*You* love her?" he asked at last.

"Love her?" cried Andrew, coarsely. "Who cares about that? I meant to marry her, and you have thwarted me. Love her? Do you suppose you love her yourself? You want the old dotard's estates, and that 's why you marry the heiress. You've a sharp eye, for all your shambling walk! And do you flatter yourself she loves you, you white-faced whipper-snapper? Straighten yourself out first, and then talk about love!"

The tirade continued, Andrew weeping tears of fury and spite. Hugo stood simply

bewildered at first, then horribly hurt, then very proud and cold. Andrew lowered himself hopelessly; depths of meanness, of rancour, of selfish ambition foiled, were revealed; Hugo had never dreamed of their existence.

"I wish I'd done the work completely when I pulled the ladder down," ended the young man, making a frantic confession; "as it is, you'd better learn to walk first before you think of making off with ladies."

Hugo's blood seemed frozen at first by these words, then boiling, as he realized first that Andrew was guilty of his deformity and years of suffering; then, that he had insulted, once again, that very deformity he had caused. For a moment he felt like murdering Andrew; his eyes blazed; then, in a moment, his sense of loathing and contempt, embittered with the knowledge of his own weakness, came back. He turned away, helpless and disgusted, down the sloping path.

But Andrew scared first, then maddened by the anger and contempt in Hugo's eyes, struck out blindly. The blow came fiercely

down behind Hugo's ear. It was enough of itself to have killed him, but the broken ankle turned, and he pitched forward in the steep and stony track, and his neck broke.

Andrew, shutting his eyes, fled madly down the hill, and crossed the river into Florence. But a small goatherd, who, perched on the rocks beneath San Miniato, had seen the blow, brought the news to the Gualbert's palace, and told of the death of Hugo and how Andrew was the murderer.

It was Tuesday in the Holy Week of Christ's Passion when this thing happened; and till the Friday Andrew lurked in the Florentine slums, shivering with fear and cold and hunger. He had been too proud to have anything to do with the poor, and now that he was living among them he did not know how to treat them; and the poor, who are amazingly charitable among themselves, would have nothing to say to this arrogant-eyed, yet obviously frightened stranger.

But on the Friday he felt that he must make a dash for escape. Very early indeed, before the sun was risen, and when even

more than at night the hills where the nobles had their houses might be expected to be asleep, he recrossed the river and made towards his home, determined secretly to make entrance, take such money as he knew where to find, and so, seeking voluntary exile, ask for military service under some distant lord.

His path lay, of course, quite close to the fatal hill-slope leading to San Miniato, where the murder had been committed. With the extraordinary impulse upon him which forces criminals to revisit once at least the scene of their crime, he turned aside to see again the place where Hugo had fallen, the broken brushwood and disturbed earth and stones where the corpse had pitched, and where, no doubt, men had marched to carry it away.

So he turned into the tiny lane, just broad enough for one, which, between two high garden walls, led out ultimately into the open hill.

* * * * * *

In those days, Good Friday was a day on which men really felt in their hearts, and showed in all their behaviour, great grief. They really had in their thoughts and

imagination the figure of a poor, exhausted man, dead almost exactly one thousand years before; but dead not easily nor in any dignified or honoured way. He was lifted up there, naked, his head twined round with brambles, spikes of iron driven through his hands and feet into the two strong poles on which he was exhibited. His blood was black upon him, for he had been treated as even in those days men would have shunned to treat a horse. To-day, were we to hear of a dumb animal so treated, the whole nation would be set sick and shuddering; the villain who was guilty would be cursed as outside human rights and privilege. But thus this tortured man had been treated, and now his ragged body was exhibited in mid-air, dead. This, however, was not the only thought that men had their minds fixed upon: else their brains had merely been morbid, sickly greedy over long past horrors. These men had not the slightest doubt that what they saw there was their own deserts. They had not the least doubt that there was such a thing as sin; and they knew and frankly confessed that they had sinned, sinned often,

were likely so to sin again. Even were it clear that in those ages sins were as many and as grave as they are to-day, at least they were recognized, not palliated by all manner of lying philosophy and half-hearted self-deception; at least it was quite undisputed that, for this, man deserved appalling punishment—the whole man, body and soul—of which the bodily penalty, itself the most dim reflection of the spiritual condemnation, was made visible to their eyes in the Crucifix. And that God should be *loved*—first for His loving Self, Who from the beginning had created and preserved them, then for the astounding Love revealed all over again and infinitely fuller in the fact that It could survive this treatment of Itself by sin—that God then should be loved, and his death grieved over, was a truth quite clear and recognizable to them.

In consequence of this, there were in John Gualbert's mind that morning, as it were, two layers of thoughts. He had received, as we said, on the night before, a mistaken report that Andrew was hiding in a house the other side of San Miniato: and was

quite frankly determined to have revenge. This, he knew, was against Christ's law: but for the moment Christ's law was not uppermost in his mind; he felt as it were in his blood the law of what people in that day thought: they would take his vengeance for granted; he, they would consider, was the proper executioner. In this thing Christ's law has by now conquered public opinion: but in many things Christ still is being defeated, though in the end His victory is certain.

That morning, however, was, as you saw, Good Friday, and the picture of the dead Christ was very vivid in most men's minds. In John's, though it was not, so to speak, upon the surface, it had risen much nearer to the surface than it had been yesterday, when it was quite thrust away beneath the blood-red pictures of approaching vengeance. But once more it was thrust back, though not far, as John passed by the place of the murder. The dead body of Hugo for the moment made the dead body of Jesus invisible. Yet Jesus was the brother of John and Hugo alike, and even of Andrew.

And it was Jesus, perhaps, who arranged that in the narrow passage we have mentioned, which lay just below the fatal hillside, John and Andrew met.

John, at the head of half a dozen men-at-arms, was walking down the steep descent, and all the light that there was was concentrated on the wide view of Florence beneath him, and in the clear blue strip of early sky above. The high walls and the overhanging rose-bushes made the passage dark. In consequence, when he turned a corner, he did not at once recognize the man who stood before him, and who had been ascending the incline. This man was Andrew, and he recognized John first. He felt as though heaven and earth had fallen into ruins. Here was death, suddenly on him: there was no more future, not on earth at least. For clearly he could not push past and go on mounting; nor could he turn and fly down the lane; that in itself would mean his recognition; and it was impossible for the shower of arrows, which would whizz down after him, to miss.

At that moment the light of recognition

sprang up into John's eyes. They flamed suddenly. Christ vanished into darkness, while the murderer himself stood there, full at his mercy.

Then suddenly the murderer became Christ. For he fell on his knees, and his arms were flung out in the shape of a Cross, and in Christ's chosen attitude he looked wildly into the eyes of John.

And in John's mind, with a rush as though of a diver shooting up through the water, the other picture and all it meant arose. In his case, Christ conquered. In the person of Andrew he had meant to kill Christ: he saw that: to kill Him again for the thousandth time perhaps; since, long ago, Christ died for the love of him, and ever since then his sins had been crucifying Him afresh.

His arm fell. "Go in peace," he said.

But the murderer was as it were paralyzed. He could not move.

"Go to the house," John ordered the men-at-arms.

Then he stooped, himself half dazed, and lifted Andrew, and "Come with me," he said to him.

Andrew followed without a word, and together the young men climbed the steep part of the ascent which remained between themselves and San Miniato. They entered the dark church, open, though the service was not yet begun. The complicated ritual of later times was not yet in vogue, and the great Crucifix, uncovered, gazed solemnly down upon them, as they knelt just below it in a spot that John had gone to.

Then began for Andrew a long spell of waiting and watching and wondering. He was quite unable to pray, for his brain was numbed by days of all but starvation, and the double shock of his meeting John and his escape from death which he had experienced was enough of itself to daze him. As his eyes grew accustomed to the darkness, the Crucifix stood out clearer and clearer. He could see now the fingers cramped round the nails; the long cloth that fell in little regular folds to the knees; the drawn face with haggard eyes looking down on them. He studied it half apathetically, remembering how it had dominated his life in spite of himself. That visit on the day of its erection

had occasioned his first grudge against Hugo, and had also been occasion of later visits, among which was the fatal one, when he had tugged at the ladder, and made Hugo fall, and after which had sprung into full life those seeds of original hatred sown years before, though he so carefully hid their growth. And now here he was again at this crisis of his existence before the Crucifix.

Then he looked at John, and wondered what he was thinking of. As a matter of fact, John was scarcely thinking at all; he too was just looking at the Crucifix, but his soul unconsciously was holding a wonderful conversation with it. "I," said Jesus long ago, "if I be lifted up will draw all men to myself." And John's soul was streaming upwards towards Christ. As it poured up, all the old picture of blood and murder, of his dead brother's face and of the assassin and of revenge was left behind, and vanished like a mist in an infinite void. All vanished for him, as he knelt there, forgiving and loving and thinking only of God's infinity of mercy, save the great sad and suffering Face, solemn now with a new joy.

And just as his whole soul seemed to make an effort to win upwards across the intervening space, Christ stooped from His Cross and through all heaven, leaning till His lips kissed John's. But all that Andrew knew was that John turned, and leaning towards him, took his right hand in his, put his left upon his shoulder, and kissed him too, as brother might a brother, on the forehead.

But as he stooped to do that, Andrew saw that the face which looked into his was that of Christ crucified Himself.

Then, without a word, they went out. John returned home, and Andrew, with what means he might, went out to begin another life in a far other world.

* * * * * *

John's ideals changed after that. It was not long before he left army and palaces behind, and became God's servant as a monk. That was not because he was a coward, and ran away from the world, for, as you have seen, he did the bravest thing that any man can do, and conquered, at one blow, his enemy, the world's opinion, and himself. And he needed much conquering, for his

was a strong character, as you would guess if you saw his firm black handwriting.

Later on, he founded the Order of Vallombrosa, to which the church once belonged where the famous crucifix was carried to be unveiled upon Good Friday.

From the beautiful monastery itself, the Government evicted the monks in 1869, and established a School of Forestry there instead. No doubt useful things are learnt in it; but hardly so useful or so noble as all the lessons which St. John's story taught his monks; though the Government was fortunate, indeed, in having to deal with men whose whole tradition dated from an action of Forgiveness done for the sake of Christ Crucified, ten centuries ago.

THE END

CHISWICK PRESS: PRINTED BY CHARLES WHITTINGHAM AND CO.
TOOKS COURT, CHANCERY LANE, LONDON.

244.3
M366

Martindale, C.C.
St. Christopher
breaker of men

244.3
M366